DAGGERFALL: Exclusive Review!

23 REVIEWS

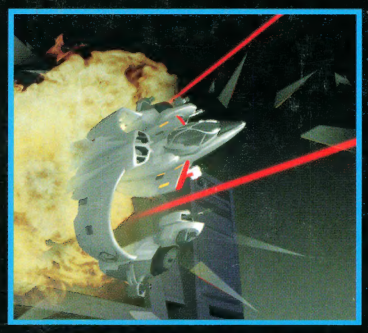
PC GAMES

THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO COMPUTER GAMING

BLIZZARD'S
Starcraft

C&C: Red Alert and
7 Real-Time Combat Titles

GUIDED TOUR
Leisure Suit Larry 7



EXCLUSIVE REVIEW
HellBender

Strategies & Cheats

An IDG Communications Publication

November 1996
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Tomb Raider
Crusader: No Regret
Timelapse
Time Commando

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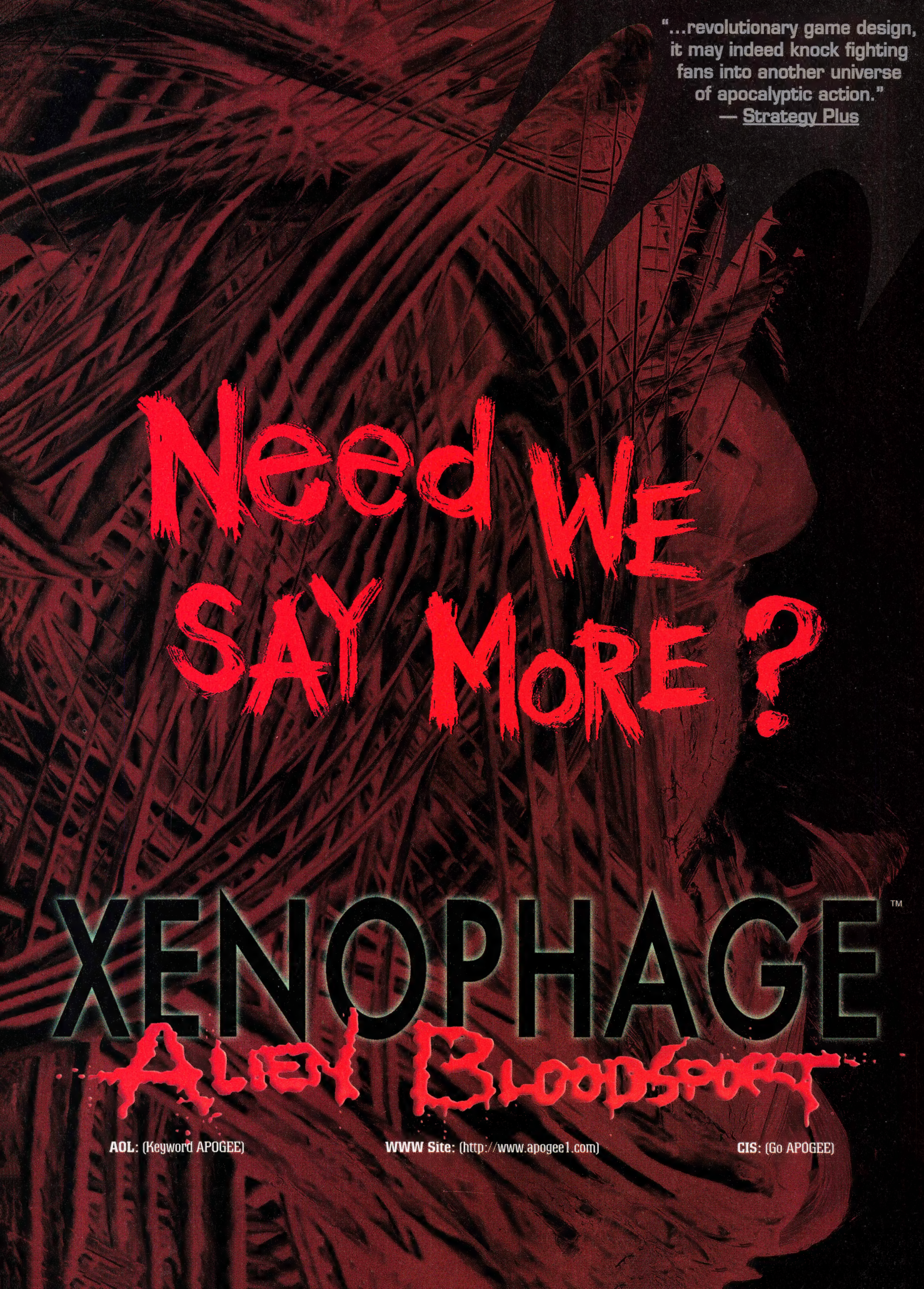
FLESH RIPPING,
BLOOD SUCKING,
CLAW SLASHING,
TAIL WHIPPING,
KARATE KICKING,
FIST RAMMING,
BODY SLAMMING,
BLOOD SPURTING ACTION...


"...revolutionary game design, it may indeed knock fighting fans into another universe of apocalyptic action."
— Strategy Plus
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The best fighters from around the universe battle

By far, the largest, most detailed foes ever seen in a fighting game on the PC. Exotic charcters up to 3/4 of the screen's height. Far better than **Mortal Kombat**, **Street Fighter**, **One Must Fall**, **Ressurection**, and every other fighting game.

Each win allows you to advance to the next round.

Customize your matches with several different options, including fighter quickness, auto-blocking off/on, special moves toggle, and a dozen more.

Innovative screen pa
real-time scaling, shado
like those only seen

Lose and your homewo

Spine tingling music by Bobby Prince, (famous for **Duke Nukem 3D** and **DOOM**) with heart stopping sound and voice effects.

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e in the ultimate tournament.

If you are looking for something new and innovative in fighting games, you found it. Special never-before-seen moves, concussion causing combos, resurrections, & humiliations.

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ows and special FX,
in the arcade.

Rip your friends apart with 2-player head-to-head action at the same computer. Even though one player games are awesome, nothing is more fun than pounding on a friend.

rld is destroyed. Survival *is your only option!*

Eight blood thirsty characters, two bone crushing champions and a nasty surprise that you will never be able to forget.

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"...revolutionary game design, it may indeed knock fighting fans into another universe of apocalyptic action."
— Strategy Plus

The best fighters from arowna the universe battle in the ultimate tournament.

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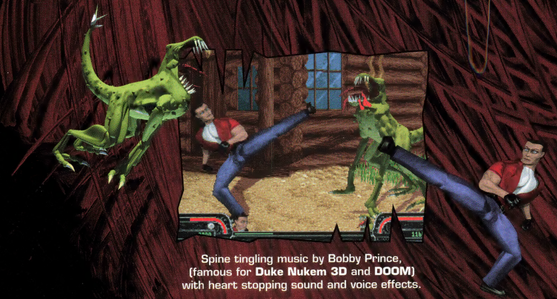
Innovative screen panning, zooming, real-time scaling, shadows and special FX, like those only seen in the arcade.

Rip your friends apart with 2-player head-to-head action at the same computer. Even though one player games are awesome, nothing is more fun than pounding on a friend.

Lose and your homeworld is destroyed. Survival is your only option!



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F-22
COMANCHE 3
ARMORED
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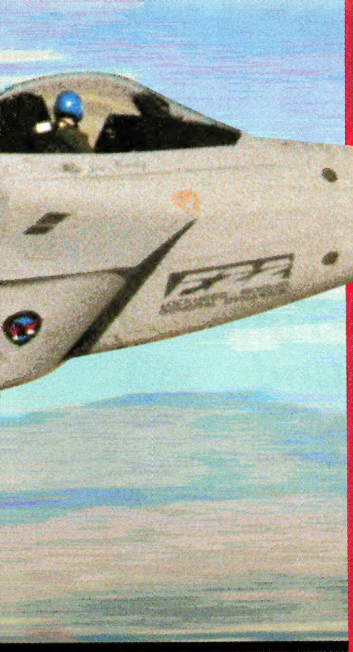
M1A2 ABRAMS



AMONG OTHER THINGS, WE'VE BLOWN THE CRITICS AWAY.

Here's what the commanding experts of sims have to say about us:

"The F-22 here is by far the most strikingly rendered plane yet seen in a PC simulation."
- Denny Atkin
Computer Gaming World
September 1996

"The look of the sky as you soar through it, the glare of the sun and the shifting of your F-22 as you perform maneuvers are simply unparalleled in the world of flight sims...[It will] keep even the most jaded flight-sim fan glued to the monitor..."
- Glenn Broderick
Computer Player
September 1996

"Easy to play and still over the top in battle situations, not only will this version [Comanche 3] be plain fun, it'll look as fabulous upon arrival as the original Comanche did."
- Computer Games Strategy Plus
August 1996

"Still pictures can't do justice to the smoothness and beauty produced by Voxel Space 2. Players will have to see the game [Armored Fist 2- M1A2 Abrams] for themselves to appreciate just how groundbreaking NovaLogic's 3D engine really is."
- Next Generation
August 1996

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NOVALOGIC - THE ART OF WAR™

NOVEMBER 1996

PC GAMES™

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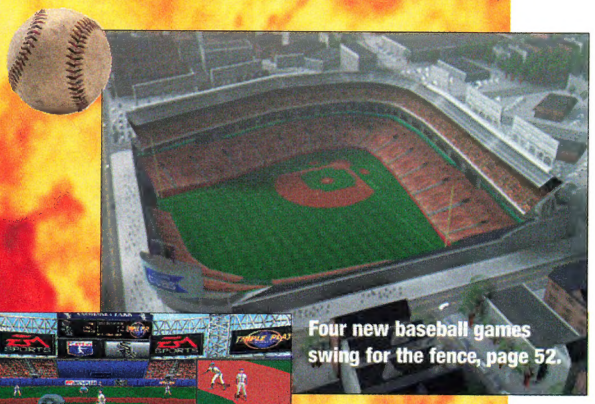
The newest real-time strategy games draw near—and they look awesome. Get a sneak peek on page 44.



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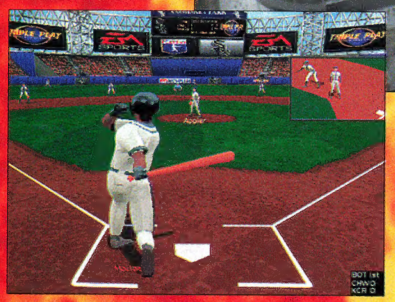

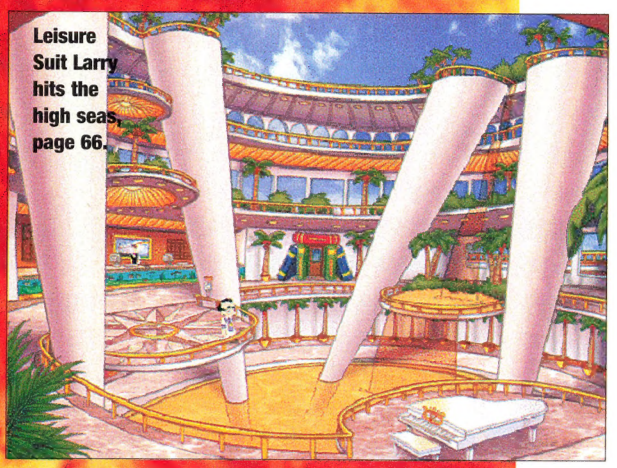

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PC GAMES™ VOLUME 3, NUMBER 11

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PLAY the Demo on the disc

LAST SUMMER YOU FOUGHT FOR HONOR AND GLORY. THIS FALL YOU'LL PRAY FOR MERCY.

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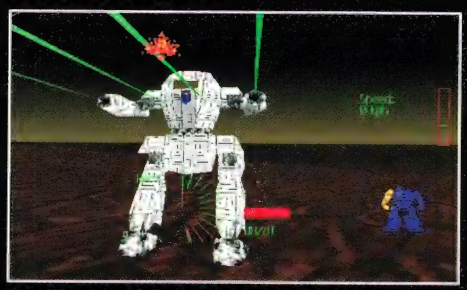

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Publisher's Page

Gini Talmadge

A Whole Lotta Quakin' Going On

The gaming industry is quickly evolving into a mass market. Only a few short years ago, gamers were a relatively small group of technical whizzes who programmed in DOS and kept their hobby largely to themselves. Now everyone is getting into the game: About $6 billion was spent on games last year, and millions of gamers are playing with or against each other, whether through mass media like America Online, Internet gaming services like TEN and Mplayer, or modem-to-modem games with friends across the street and across the world.

Many of today's games are being developed with large groups in mind for full multiplayer capability. What was once thought of as a young man's hobby is now attractive for consumers of all kinds—as long as they have a PC, some time to spare, and the desire for some creative fun!

PC Games wants to give you everything you need to know about all your gaming options. Our goal is to get important gaming news to you fast, show previews and reviews of new games to you first, and fill the magazine and Web site with interesting ways for you to further your gaming knowledge and skills.

We're spending a lot of time trying out networked and online games so that we can be there first with what's fun and cool for you to try in the wide world of multiplayer games. This fall, several new multiplayer services end their beta tests and go live over the wires. We covered this phenomenon in our premiere issue this past June, and we take a look at the emerging market—and the challenges it faces—in this month's News section. You can count on us to cover what's exciting in the online world, both in the magazine and at our new Web area devoted to MPG/online gaming, In The Arena (at **www.pcgamesmag.com/arena/**).

Sit back and enjoy this issue's variety of reviews, news, and features. And know that you're joined by over 100,000 other readers and their friends who enjoy your passion and ours—PC games.

Gini Talmadge
President & Publisher

Keep talking to us at pcgamesletters@iftw.com, or visit our Web site at **www.pcgamesmag.com.**

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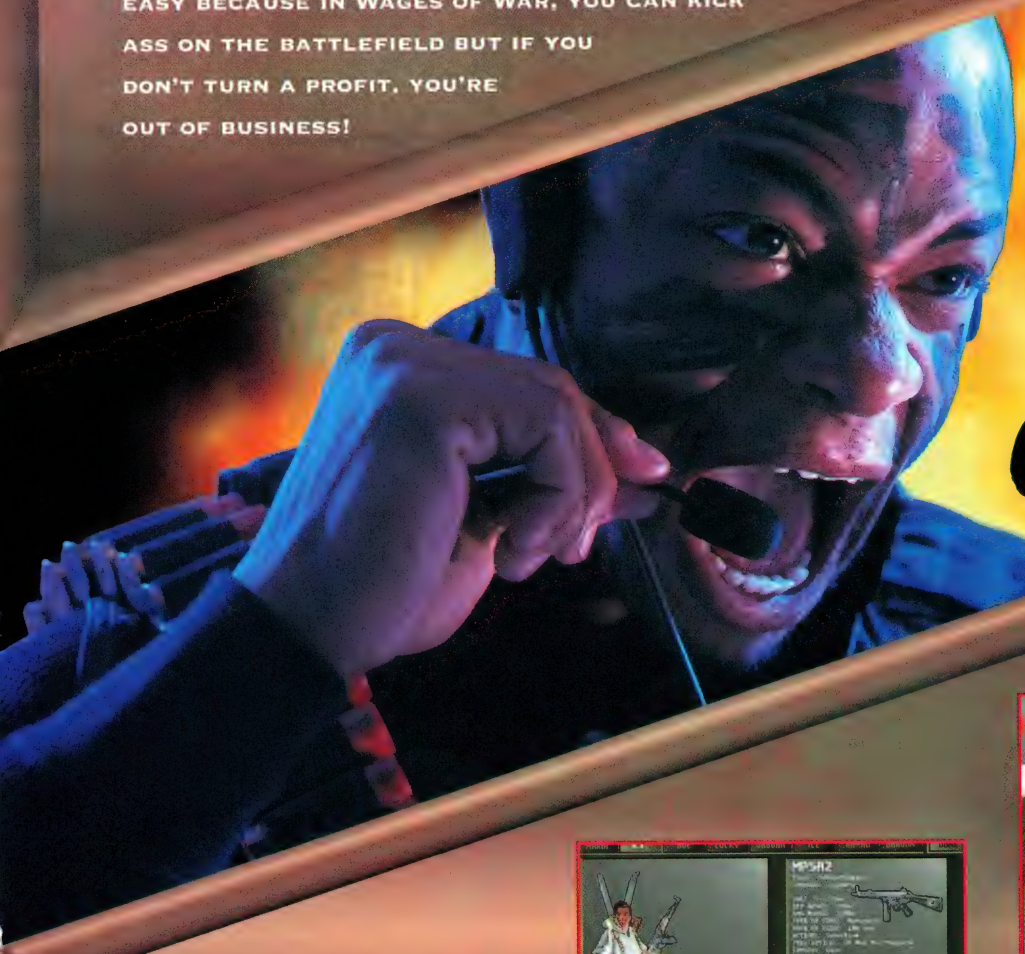

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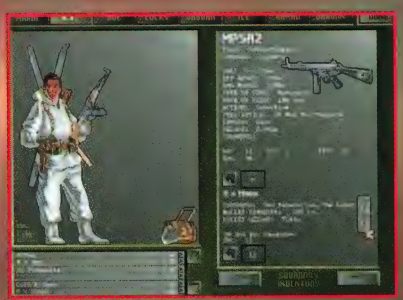

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PC GAMES.EXE

DEMO OF THE MONTH
Amok
GT Interactive

Jump into a small but perfectly formed mech to pound around the battle-scarred landscape of the city in this superb demo level. Three viewing options—two third-person views and a first-person perspective—provide plenty of opportunity to see the explosive action from any angle.

Your mech is simple to control, but swift reflexes are needed to avoid the constant barrage from enemy infantry and tanks. Three stages make up this fully playable mission. With numerous video options, depending on the speed and graphics capability of your system, Amok looks like an absolute dream. Explosive sound effects add to the atmosphere, and the pumping soundtrack that will accompany the full game is sure to get the adrenaline rushing.

What's on the Disc

Demo of the Month
Amok (GT Interactive)

Action Games
Alien Trilogy (Acclaim)
Captain Quazar (Studio 3DO)
Fire Fight (Epic MegaGames)
Marathon 2: Durandal (Bungie)
Nihilist (Philips New Media)
Scorched Planet (Virgin)
Spider-Man (Byron Preiss)

Adventure Games
Leisure Suit Larry 7 (Sierra)

Fly & Drive Games
Hind (Interactive Magic)
Interstate 76 (Activision)
MechWarrior2: Mercenaries (Activision)
Monster Truck Madness (Microsoft)

Role-Playing Games
Diablo (Blizzard Entertainment)

Sports Games
3DO Decathlon (Studio 3DO)
Frank Thomas Baseball (Acclaim)

Strategy Games
American Civil War (Interactive Magic)
Deadlock (Accolade)
War Wind (SSI)

Utilities
Game Guru (Studio 3DO)

Getting Started

Win 95

1. Insert the disc in the CD-ROM drive.
2. Wait a few seconds and follow onscreen instructions.

Win 3.1

1. Start Windows.
2. Insert the disc in the CD-ROM drive.
3. Select Run from the Program Manager's File menu.
4. Type "d:\install" in the Command Line box and press Enter.
5. Follow onscreen instructions.

Getting Around

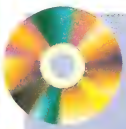
The slinky, speedy, colorful interface makes access to those hot games a breeze. With a stunning 20 demos (including 17 playable ones), hours of entertainment and game-playing satisfaction await you. So we want to make accessing these games as simple and painless a task as possible. Here's how to do it:

On the Welcome screen, have a quick look at the full list of demos. Use the arrow keys to scroll through the list to get an idea of what's in store. A quick click on the Take me to your Demos button puts you right where you want to be.

Beginning with the Demo of the Month—guaranteed to get those gaming glands gushing—clicking on the main picture transports you straight to further details, product specs, and contact details for that game. From there, the Read Me button supplies all the information you need to get the most from your chosen game, be it background settings or control configurations.

Keep clicking on the More button to scroll through all the pages, each one highlighting four of the games that you can install or just play straight from the CD.

It's as simple as that.



If you are a current subscriber and would like to upgrade your subscription to include the CD-ROM of playable game demos, please contact us at 800-688-4575.

Alien Trilogy

Acclaim

Know anything about the PlayStation? Well, Alien Trilogy has been universally praised in that market as being something of a stormer. Has it converted well to the PC? Check out this great demo level and see for yourself.

Chilling atmospheres are the essence of the *Alien* saga, and the game goes all out to capture this aspect as face huggers scurry in darkened corners and aliens prepare to launch their viscous attacks from any direction. With ammo at a premium, a good eye will help keep you out of their vile clutches.

Captain Quazar

Studio 3DO

Comic book–style capers abound in this entertaining action game, which places you in the odd-sized shoes of an intergalactic supercop. There's a simple storyline involving evil crime bosses, but it's all done in a pleasantly humorous manner. So grab the guns and get blasting, because the galaxy contains plenty of things to be blown up–if you shoot 'em enough.

Fire Fight

Epic MegaGames

Fast, frenetic, explosive action is the essence of Epic's isometric shooter. Backed by stunning Super VGA graphics and funky parallax scrolling, it looks like an absolute treat. An original control interface also helps you navigate your way around the various levels, to destroy what needs to be destroyed.

Six weapons and items such as cloaking devices and mines need to be used strategically to keep your craft in one piece. But when the moment's right, go all out–and set the world ablaze.

Marathon 2: Durandal

Bungie

One of the most popular Mac Doom clones comes to the PC. Battle through the three single-player levels or take on some buddies in the network level. It all began with a story involving the colony ship *Marathon* being disabled in orbit around the planet Tau Ceti. When an alien attack was launched, you were the last survivor and the only hope for success. If you aren't Doom-cloned-out, give this fun first-person shooter a go.

Nihilist

Philips Media

A veritable blasting actionfest, Nihilist puts you in the cockpit of a nifty spaceship with unlimited ammo and an itchy trigger finger. Eliminating everyone who crosses your path is one way of gathering the "Kash" needed to upgrade your ship into the ultimate space combat hotrod.

Great graphics are accompanied by a rockin' soundtrack, creating a thoroughly entertaining action blast.

Scorched Planet

Virgin

Blending elements of strategy and tactics in a colorful, detailed, and fast 3D shooter could make Scorched Planet one of the hottest games of the year.

Paying homage to Defender–one of the greatest video games ever devised–Criterion has used its own cutting-edge 3D technology to produce an action game that requires an eye toward deployment of resources as well as speed of trigger finger.

Your convertible fighter morphs from plane to tank in one quick movement, allowing you the chance to save colonists from ground and aerial assaults. Insectoid mutants and lizard-like monstrosities serve themselves up as unwilling cannon-fodder. Hoo-wah!

Spider-Man: The Sinister Six

Byron Preiss

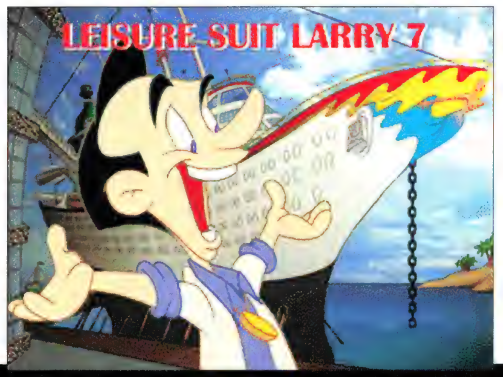
Don the spider suit and the alter-ego of Peter Parker as Spider-Man faces his most famous and deadly enemies–Doctor Octopus, Shocker, Hobgoblin, Chameleon, Mysterio, and Vulture. This Sinister Six inhabit a fully animated world where the web-slinger has to solve puzzles and overcome the dangers of battling ruthless super-villains who've teamed up to frame him. Can you help him clear his name?

Adventure Games

Leisure Suit Larry 7: Love for Sail

Sierra

He's back for yet another episode in this hugely popular and long-running adventure series. Larry Laffer's latest escapade puts him onboard a cruise ship, run by Captain Thygh (No. 1 on the groan count). Scantily clad women abound, and in the full version you'll be able to add your own picture and sounds. With the impact of the scratch-'n'-sniff card to be bundled with each game, you'll surely get fully involved in this crazy story.



Fly & Drive Games

Hind

Interactive Magic

Digital Integration's Apache was a big hit, and the follow-up, Hind, looks likely to please helicopter sim buffs and casual flyers alike. This demo puts you in the cockpit of the Russian gunship, equipped with unlimited ammo. The full version will let you sit in as pilot or gunner in this versatile attack and troop-carrying helicopter.

For now, though, just enjoy the scenery and the chance to blow away plenty of buildings without fear of getting into any serious trouble.

Interstate 76 and MechWarrior 2: Mercenaries

Activision

Check out our movies for a sneak peek at the latest stage of development of these two hotly anticipated titles.

Monster Truck Madness

Microsoft

Big-wheel monster-truck mayhem is the name of the game in this arcade racer. If you're a fan of the sport, you'll love the opportunity to jump into the driving seat of Bigfoot and other grueling machines. This demo features one track and a choice of two trucks to drive in a race against the clock.

Jump, bumps, ramps, and flyovers make getting through those checkpoints a more awkward proposition than it may initially appear. Numerous viewing points let you get the best angle to see the thrills and the spills, the rocks and the rolls, of this hugely entertaining arcade racer. Buckle up and rev those engines for some top racing action.

Role-Playing Games

Diablo

Blizzard Entertainment

After the phenomenal success of Warcraft II, expectations for Blizzard's next big release were high. Sneak peeks at trade shows further enhanced Diablo's standing, and as it now enters its final development phase, this amazing demo highlights just a small portion of a huge, epic adventure.

There are more than three hours of gameplay to be had with the one mission contained in this demo. Exploring the village, talking to the residents, and losing yourself in the setting is fun in itself, but there's also a frightening storyline to uncover.

Delving into the dungeon tests the mettle of the hardiest of warriors. In the demo, you can begin to get a feel for the epic extent that battling Diablo entails.

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Sports Games

3DO Decathlon

Studio 3DO

Compete in the 100 meters or the long jump in this playable demo of 3DO's Decathlon. Select your athlete and randomly determine his starting statistics in the three vital categories of strength, stamina, and speed before taking to the track to take on some of the best athletes in the world. Current world-record rankings are there to be broken, including the latest from the 1996 Olympic games. Can you beat Donovan Bailey's dazzling 9.84-second sprint in the 100-meter dash?

Some excellent graphics and a challenging model make the competition against the other athletes entertaining and rewarding. If you missed the Olympics, you've got to give this a whirl.

Frank Thomas Big Hurt Baseball

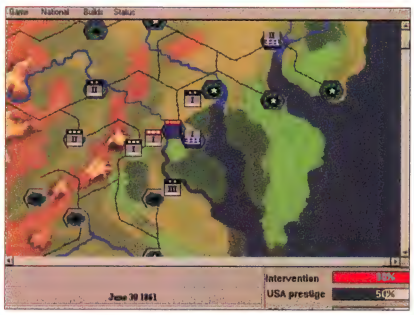
Acclaim

Play as either Frank's Chicago White Sox or the Atlanta Braves in a three-inning exhibition shootout in this great demo. Acclaim has used cutting-edge motion-capture technology to give an amazingly realistic look to both the players and the stadiums. It's a treat to look at and play, so swing for the fence.

Strategy Games

American Civil War

Interactive Magic



This playable demo gives you the chance to control the Union side, beginning at the war's onset in 1861. The computer controls the Confederate army as you begin to organize your forces in various locations throughout the country. With the help of some realistic battlefield scenes, the sense of scale and the harsh realities of this bloody war are brought to the fore.

Getting to grips with the game's control method can be tricky, but I-Magic's excellent README file takes you through the events covered in the demo in easy stages. Once you've practiced, you can go out and plan the tactics for your own battles.

War Wind

SSI

SSI's long tradition of quality fantasy and strategy titles looks set to continue as it delves into the realms of real-time with War Wind. This fully playable demo features four separate single-player scenarios, each one introducing one of the four races who will be fighting the epic campaigns featured in the full version.

Each race has its own unique strengths, weaknesses, and strategies that need to be harnessed skillfully for its world domination plan to succeed. Ancient artifacts, mysterious magic, and mighty heroes give a vital edge to those who can locate and utilize these elements. So get familiar with these very different races in preparation for the full battle.

Deadlock

Accolade

If achieving galactic domination pulls your wires, then Deadlock is right up your street. Take one of seven species on the road to success–a road littered with problems created by the six opposing factions and other outside influences. Your job is to stealthily navigate the minefield of galactic expansion, balancing trade requirements with defense budgets against the backdrop of a highly volatile political situation.

Included with this demo are options to get you up and running on the Internet via the TEN or Mplayer online gaming services.

OFFICIAL CONTEST RULES AND REGULATIONS

1. No Purchase Necessary. No purchase or payment of any money is necessary to enter. To enter the sweepstakes, print your name and address (including your city, state, and zip code) on a card and mail it to: Space Bunnies Must Die! Contest, PC Games, 951 Mariner's Island Blvd., Suite 700, San Mateo, CA 94404. Enter as often as you like, but each entry must be mailed separately. All entries must be handwritten. Mechanically reproduced entries will not be accepted. Entries must be postmarked by October 25, 1996. Entries will not be returned. The sponsor and Infotainment World, Inc., assume no responsibility for lost, mutilated, late, or misdirected entries.
2. Prizes. Space Bunnies Must Die! prize package grand prize and other prizes will be awarded. Grand prize is valued at less than $500. Winners will be determined at a drawing to be held on October 31, 1996. All prizes will be awarded. Prize winners will be notified by mail by November 30, 1996. To claim your prize, send your winning game piece to Space Bunnies Must Die! Contest, PC Games, 951 Mariner's Island Blvd, Suite 700, San Mateo, CA 94404.
3. Odds of Winning. Odds of winning will be determined by number of entries.
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5. Requirements and Responsibility of Winners. Winners will be required to sign an affidavit of eligibility and a publicity release that will allow the use of winners' names and likenesses for other promotional activities by the sponsor and/or Infotainment World, Inc. All federal, state and local taxes are the responsibility of winners.
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7. Record Keeping. A list of the winners will be kept for at least two years.
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Highlights of the Month

The Strategy Zone

Your appetite for strategy games is unabated, and there's plenty out there now–and a lot more to come. When you've read our "Real-Time Battleground" feature (page 44), cruise on over to our Strategy Zone at **www.pcgamesmag.com/strategy/** for links and info galore on old favorites and new offerings.

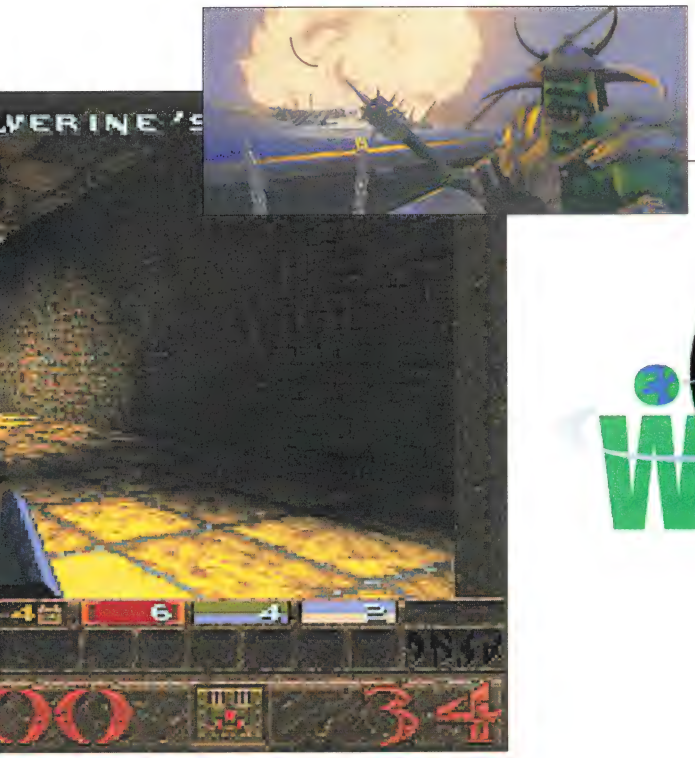
PC Games Online has everything you want about Quake, Warcraft II, and all your MPG favorites.

The A List

More than anything, *PC Games* exists to bring you the last word on games–how they play, what's worth it, and how to beat 'em. In tandem with our review archive (unparalleled by any other magazine on the Web), you can now find the entire *PC Games* A List for 1995 and 1996–every game over the past two years that we've rated as the cream of the playing crop. It'll take you to our full review of the gameplay, screen shots, downloads, and the sites that a game's biggest fans have put up. Go to **www.pcgamesmag.com/features/the_a_list** for the very best in gaming.

In the Arena

More and more, the hottest action in gaming is head to head–blowing away your friends, neighbors, or a complete stranger 3,000 miles away. We live to play this way, too, and now *PC Games* is the place to go for all the info you want on the exploding MPG and online scenes. Go In the Arena, and we'll fill you in on what the hottest new multiplayer games are and give you the newest levels to download. This is where you'll find the Quake Epicenter, the Nukem Files, and more. We'll also bring you the latest news from the new online gaming services such as Mplayer, TEN and Dwango. And we'll keep tabs on the big online services, too. Check out **www.pcgamesmag.com/arena** for all your multiplayer needs–before your opponent does!



TipWorld

The key to winning is often that one little strategy or tip that isn't readily apparent to you in the heat of battle. So let *PC Games* tell you how to take out that pesky monster, dogged Spitfire, or demon from the depths! Sign up for the PC Games Tip of the Day, and we'll e-mail you a gaming tip every weekday that should help you negotiate the maze in that one game that's really killing you. Each week, we feature a different game. Just point your browser to **www.tipworld.com/games/**, fill out the form, and we'll do the rest.

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- Libraries of downloads, add-on levels, patches, screen shots, and more, broken down by category–and you can add to them, too!
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- Plus, a weekly conference every Thursday at 4 p.m. Pacific Standard Time (that's 7 p.m. on the East Coast, 6 p.m. in the Midwest, and 5 p.m. in the Mountain time zone) with *PC Games* editors who'll give you the latest lowdown on the happenings in gameland. We'll also feature regular industry guests who'll tell you about the newest developments in games.

Our partnership with CompuServe brings a new dimension to PC Games Online–one we think you'll like. Come on by and GO PCGAMES.

Every Day on PC Games Online

What are the regular features you'll find on PC Games Online? Check 'em out:

- More and more, game news happens every day. When we meet with the game companies and producers, and when the hot releases are ready for you, we'll let you know.
- The Web's got it all–company information, downloads, and the sites that *you* create in tribute to your favorites. Here's where to find links to 'em all.
- Let's face it–you're good, but sometimes you just can't find that one weapon you really want. Go to our Cheats section for the codes to crack your favorite games.
- We review *everything*. You'll find more in-depth information about more games than on any other magazine on the Web.
- It's the upcoming titles that push the envelope of technology, graphics, and playability, and our Guided Tours–frequently extended with even more art than in the magazine–give you a full interactive look at the most promising new games.
- As Hollywood continues to sink its claws into the gaming medium, we bring you one-on-one chats with the stars you'll find in today's games.

Letters

Question of the Month:
Female Protagonists?

Phantasmagoria and King's Quest VIII were some of the first games to cast women as the main characters–not victims, not sirens, not sidekicks. Now, with Tomb Raider, Obsidian, and Space Bunnies Must Die!, it's looking like the female lead may turn into a full-fledged trend. How do you feel about it? Are you more likely or less likely to buy a game because you'd be playing a woman, or does it even matter? Do these characters affect the games they're in? If so, how? What else do you have to say about it? Let us know your opinion by writing to us at Letter to the Editor, PC Games, 951 Mariner's Island Blvd., Suite 700, San Mateo, CA 94404; faxing us at 415-349-7482; or e-mailing us at pcgamesletters@iftw.com. Please include your full name with each letter.

Yahoo! The results are in for our September Question of the Month (Now that Quake is finally here, what game are you most looking forward to?), and it looks like you're pretty excited about some upcoming titles. You're also looking ahead: the most frequently anticipated game was Wing Commander V, not due for at least a year. Here's what some of you had to say:

Out with Quake! Bring on Red Alert! It seems like I've been waiting for years. Duke Nukem, er, Quake is just another rehashed Doom game–the only notable difference is new baddies and weapons. At least Red Alert won't just be C&C or Warcraft rehashed; they already did that with the add-on missions. Enough of these regurgitated games. I'm sick of beating games in under a month, just to find that my newest purchase is another clone of the game I just beat.
Sung Kim
Via the Internet

Wing Commander V is going to hit store shelves and become an instant hit. I can't wait for it to be released, and I can't wait to hear more rumors about it. It's gonna be a great game; graphics, sound, gameplay, and addiction are all gonna add to its success, just like the past Wing Commander games have done. The only downfall that I can see is the fact that it is supposed to require Pentium-speed machines. Then we are faced with the problem "To upgrade or not to upgrade?" That is the real question. Either way, Wing Commander V is gonna be a great game.
Steve Blake
Via the Internet

The game I'm looking forward to is Alien Alliance. In your August issue you did a Guided Tour of it, and I was stunned by the great graphics and plot. Being a space/alien fanatic, I love the idea of a strategy game that involves action and diplomacy.
Victor Shih
San Francisco, CA

I'm a role-playing freak; I own lots of RPGs, computer and otherwise. That's why I can't wait until The Elder Scrolls: Daggerfall comes out. I couldn't stop playing the first one, so I'm counting on the second one being even better.
Matt Spaulding
Via the Internet

ILLUSTRATION BY PAUL WILEY

Not Impressed

I have read with interest your continuing coverage of Quake. After the shareware levels I am left wondering, so what? In my opinion, Quake is merely a prettier Doom II. After all the raves about the graphics, I, for one, was not all that impressed. Compared to Phantasmagoria, Zork: Nemesis, and other games of that caliber, Quake seems a little overrated already. This is not to say Quake (so far) is not an excellent Doom clone; it is. But that's the problem: Aside from the new entrance to levels, which I admit is pretty damn cool, I see just a prettier Doom!

By the way, I bought MissionForce: Cyberstorm on the basis of your review alone. Now this is an excellent, deep, and gorgeous game that more than lives up to the pre-sell!
Terry Leonard
Via the Internet

After an hour and a half of downloading Quake 1.01 (the shareware version), I feverishly unzipped it and set it up. YES! Quake was mine! I started the game, and, and, what? THIS is QUAKE? Sure, the graphics of the enemy may be realistic (if you live in NO CURVES LAND!), but what about the little things that make Duke Nukem kick? Quake's shotgun has no boom, and it doesn't even leave bullet holes! When you fire the shotgun, it makes gray specks on the wall. Plus, the graphics suck until you get close. The radiation symbol looks like a plus sign until you get close. And I can't find a storyline; I know it's probably corny, but it makes a game sometimes. Plus, it took me 10 minutes to figure out how to save my game. There are no high-low detail levels. Please, please, tell me that this is going to be fixed in later versions. Dammit, I WANT BULLET HOLES!
Jared Walters
Via the Internet

Sorry, Jared—no bullet holes. Maybe in the sequel. —*Ed.*

That's All?!

I just bought Star Trek: Klingon. It's cool, but short: I beat it in one day!!! Are there any add-ons?
John Georgelas
Via the Internet

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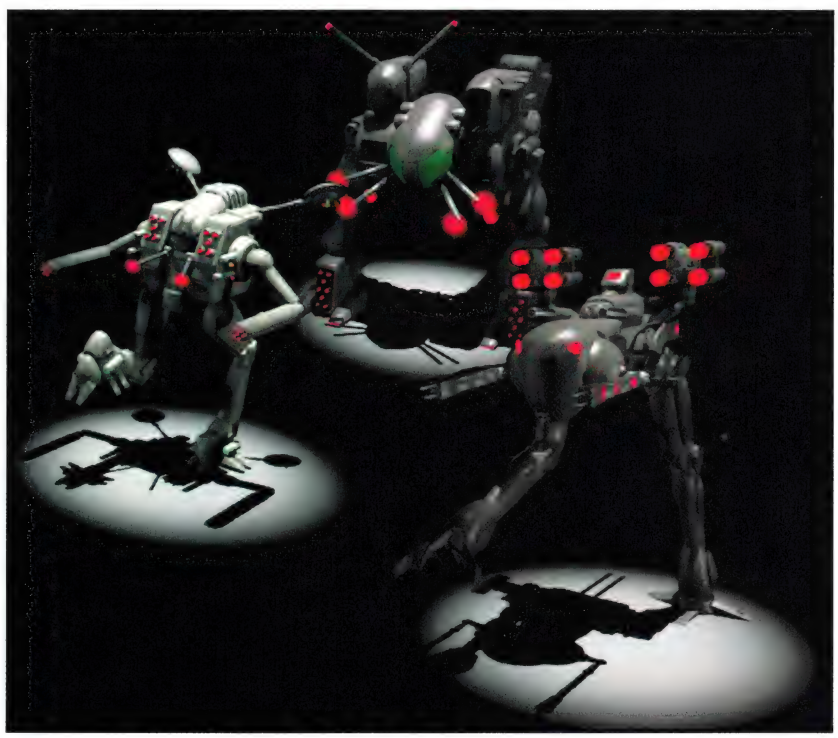
INSCAPE™

We liked Klingon, too, John, so we're sorry to tell you that Simon & Schuster has no plans for any add-ons. The good news is that the next full-motion-video Trek game, Star Trek: Borg, will be out in mid-November. As reported in last month's story, Borg's production team hopes to address complaints about Klingon's short gameplay by giving the new game multiple plot paths at varying points. Hopefully, that'll do the trick. —*Ed.*

Great Deal or Big Steal?

A few days ago I received an e-mail from someone offering over three pages of unbelievable deals on computers and hardware. It said they would give me a 2.5GB hard drive and a Pentium 166 chip and board for only $80 each. All I had to do was pay half of the money up-front. For me, these deals sounded great, since I try to run all of the newest games on a 486DX4/100 with 8MB of RAM. I realize that it would be easy for anyone to try to scam people's money like that, but the letter they sent seemed real enough. What do you think I should do?

Chris Jones
Via the Internet



Here's one situation where it's best to be cautious; this deal could definitely be phony. If it were us, we'd pass or try to get the company to send the equipment C.O.D or billed to a credit card. If you use a credit card and do not receive what you paid for, you can contest the charge with your credit company and refuse payment. If you're interested in getting good deals on computer equipment, check out local swap meets or classifieds. —*Ed.*

Same Old, Same Old

I love your magazine, but I have a comment to make about the PC gaming industry in itself: I think it's way too limited. Either you have a Doom/Wolfenstein clone or you have a cyberpunk or thriller such as Phantasmagoria, 7th Guest, Bad Mojo, etc. I know there are plenty of other games out there, but they aren't of the same quality, and they don't get as much media attention. As much as I love PC games, I think they will get worn out fast.

Michael R. Bell
Via the Internet

We can't say we agree with you, Michael. It's true that there's a glut of Doom clones and puzzle-type thrillers out there, and that the ones that really add something to the genre are in the minority. You could also argue that certain first-person shoot-'em-ups and interactive adventures tend to be overpublicized. But these kinds of games still make up only a small portion of the quality titles on the shelves. Want a great game that's neither Doom clone nor interactive adventure? Check out MissionForce: Cyberstorm. Or Grand Prix II. Or Close Combat. Or Links LS. The list of solid games that aren't even remotely Doom clones or thrillers is fairly long—they're just waiting for you to discover them. We're confident the PC gaming industry still has a lot of new, exciting experiences to offer. If we weren't, we wouldn't be here. —*Ed.*

Action-Packed

I'm really into action games and I'm wondering if you could tell me what you think are the best ones around.

Gerald Elpert
Via the Internet

Sure—we'll give you some favorites out of those released in the last year or so. Top of the list right now are, yup, Quake and Duke Nukem 3D; we've been fighting among ourselves for months about which one's better. There's also Mortal Kombat 3, Terra Nova, and Z. And we like Fire Fight, Earthworm Jim 1 and 2, Descent II, Battle Arena Toshinden, CyberMage, Terminator: Future Shock, Crusader: No Remorse...the list goes on. Keep an eye on our A List for the games we think are the best from all categories. —*Ed.*

Manuals, Part II

I am responding to the column in your July issue titled "Where's the Manual?" Steve Klett believes that if game companies don't include manuals, and the prices are lowered, the games will sell just as well. Well, I totally disagree. While I do agree that all games should have printed manuals, I do not agree that the game will sell equally well. If you see a Porsche for $20,000 dollars, you'd think that this is a lesser car, wouldn't you? I would, and the same thing goes for games. If I saw a brand-new Sierra game for $30, I would think it was a piece of junk compared to its spectacular predecessors. If people see a cheap game, they would think that you get what you pay for, which is true in most cases. I would only buy a less expensive game if I had read a review in your magazine that said it was a good game. Most game buyers probably don't read your magazine, or any others, for that matter (no offense). So I believe that cheaper game prices will hurt a game's sales.

Ethan Martin
Via the Internet

I read your "Where's the Manual?" column in *PC Games* yesterday, and just wanted to give you some comments on it.

I definitely agree with you on the point of getting a manual, especially with something like a flight sim. It's nice to have something substantial to read, and to be able to flip through the pages wherever you are. I personally abhor even looking up a small tidbit within online help in Windows. I especially enjoyed some of the great manuals that came with Maxis software. It was a real pleasure to have these books, and they added greatly to the game experience. There was recently much discussion going on here within Sierra about this issue, prompted by customer comments about Silent Thunder. And now your column should revive the discussion! That's good: it's a healthy debate.

But I must find fault with one part of your commentary, the paragraph containing this sentence: "If game companies are going to eliminate printed docs, they should pass some of their savings along to the consumer."

If you apply this logic elsewhere, then it should, for example, cost much less to see a movie like *Sleepless in Seattle* than a movie such as *Jurassic Park*. I figure the former must have cost less than one-fifth what it cost to make the latter, but you don't see ticket prices reflecting that. Another example is compact discs and cassettes. It's well known that CDs cost much less to manufacture than cassettes do, but you're going to pay more for that R.E.M. disc than you are for the same recording on cassette tape.

Prices are based on supply and demand, like everything else. Wing Commander IV doesn't cost $60 because it was an expensive production. It's because the gamemakers know that's the best price point; it's what people are willing to pay. If their studies showed that they would make more money by selling the game for $40 due to sales numbers increasing enough to cover the lost margin, then I guarantee that's what they'd do. Pretend, for example, that there was some huge technological breakthrough that allowed the makers of Myst to create Myst 2 for half what the original cost to develop. You surely wouldn't write in your column that the savings should be passed along to the consumer by selling Myst 2 for half the price of Myst, would you?

Well, the manual debate is sure to get hotter. I hope that the no-manual trend doesn't continue, but I do feel it should be up to the creators of the product—games do land more toward the "creative endeavor/work of art" end of the spectrum than the "toaster/washing machine" end. Thus, online manuals might be an integral part of the game experience—for instance, being incorporated into terminal screens in a *Star Trek*–type game.

I'm not trying to suggest that it isn't largely a money issue. It is. Like I said, I myself prefer paper manuals. If I were a flight-sim fan and bought Silent Thunder, I most likely would have been irked. We'll see what happens. Being part of a large, publicly owned company is like a blessing and a curse at the same time: more money to hire great talent, but more pressure to increase the return on investment however possible.

Hey, thanks for reading my letter. By the way, I enjoy the way *PC Games* is put together more than any other game mag, and I read them all!

Steven Travers
Associate Producer
Papyrus Design Group
Via the Internet

The Player responds: Nice argument, but the disappearance of manuals with game prices staying the same is akin to going to a movie and finding that your $10 no longer gets you a seat, coke, and bucket of popcorn—it just gets you a seat. Gamers are used to getting documentation with their games; now they're not and prices are staying the same. And regardless, as unreasonable as I am, I think a movie that cost $1 million to make should indeed cost less to see than one that cost $200 million. And a music CD should cost less or at least the same as a cassette, and...

In the Letters column of your September '96 issue, Josh Whiton writes: "Activision spared little expense when it came to ensuring that we, the gamers, would be attracted to the whole Mech genre through numerous manuals and items such as Codes and Procedures of the Warrior Caste."

Really? I guess he didn't buy the Windows 95 version. It only came with a quick reference card; all other documentation was on disc. As his letter stands, it reads as a testimonial to the benevolence of Activision, while their actions in truth demonstrate nothing of the sort. I feel an editor's note following Josh's letter, clarifying this fact, would have been appropriate. If you (the editor) leave a statement of fact such as that quoted above uncontested, it will be assumed as fact.

John Scragg
Via the Internet

Excellent point, John. Next time, we'll add a clarification. —*Ed.*

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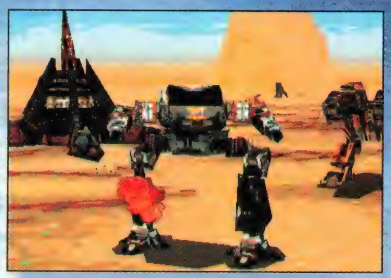

Eject from your HAWC, steal another. Bot-jacking is relatively legal here.

Wage war in everything from icy tundra to blistering desert. We suggest wearing layers.

Storm the enemy guard towers; try to avoid being turned into a red sinewy pile.

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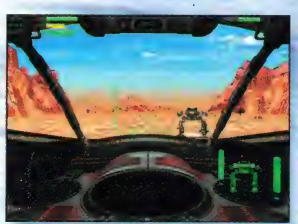

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Spout off about online gaming and you could win an Mplayer shirt. Check out our Talk Back contest, page 192.

GAME NEWS

The Online Gaming Game

Duke is far and away the most popular game on TEN, which has an exclusive five-year deal for all upcoming 3D Realms titles.

Just as Total Entertainment Network and Mplayer are ending their free beta periods and starting to charge for online multiplayer gaming, new challengers are verifying the fledgling market's viability.

Analysts and industry sources estimate that online multiplayer gaming will be a $1 billion industry within four years. That's enough to pique the interest of software giant Microsoft and telecommunications giants GTE and MCI.

Command & Conquer on Mplayer.

Microsoft recently bought Electric Gravity Inc. for its Internet Gaming Zone, a service with classic card and board games.

"We're in the evaluation stage right now," said Jon Grande, product planner for Microsoft's NetGames Group. It's likely that Microsoft will focus on low-latency content, Grande said, but HellBender and Monster Truck Madness will be on the Zone soon.

GTE is readying an area on its Web site to let people play each other in its games, and company sources say this area could lead to an online multiplayer gaming service that uses GTE's private network.

MCI has already announced U.S. plans for Wireplay, a service developed and deployed in England by British Telecommunications, and is drawing a line in the cybersand.

Latency and reliability look to be a major battleground. The Internet just isn't constructed for consistent, fast-action gameplay, says Alan Churchill, MCI market strategist. Game packets are vying for bandwidth with file downloads, Web surfing, and e-mail.

Because MCI owns its own network, "we will have the fastest thing on the block," Churchill said. Wireplay beta testing will begin early next year, with latency in the sub-100–millisecond (ms) range, Churchill said. Generally, 150ms–250ms latency is considered acceptable for fast-action games like Duke Nukem 3D or Quake.

Mpath already claims latencies below 150ms; TEN says it is in the 130ms–200ms range. Representatives from both companies say that within the next couple of years, the latency issue will be moot: Internet protocol improvements, modem improvements, and close work with Internet providers (TEN has aligned with Concentric while Mpath uses PSINet) will make playing twitch games nearly as lag-free as playing against the PC.

Mplayer's chat area features a whiteboard that lets people diagram strategies or draw whatever they want.

"American play will be pretty easy to do," said Kristin Asleson, vice president of marketing at Mpath. "Then it will be, 'Who has the lowest-latency play with Japan or Europe?'"

Whether you're a giant like MCI or a start-up like TEN and Mpath, the strategy in this new industry is clear: Get the hit titles to attract gamers, have the performance to play the games, and develop socialization aspects to foster online communities, such as chat rooms, e-mail, tournaments, and newsletters.

Skeptics ask if big companies like MCI and GTE can move fast enough in the online-gaming world to successfully implement such a

How much will you pay to play?

TEN is the first company to announce its pricing (see chart below). At press time, Mpath would only say Mplayer will be "less than $2 per hour." MCI says Wireplay pricing, which is about $2.25 an hour in the UK, will be "extremely competitive."

TEN Pricing

Basic Plan:	$9.95 per month for five hours, $1.95 for each additional hour
All-You-Can-Play Plan:	$29.95 per month for unlimited play
Special Promo:	The first 25,000 people to sign up get 50 percent off all charges through 1997

Note that there's a surcharge of $1 per hour if you're using TEN's direct-access number rather than your own ISP.

Chat areas are one of TEN's key community-building components. The service also offers player profiles and rankings.

strategy. They point to AT&T's failed stewardship of the Imagination Network, which was recently sold to America Online, and say that recognizing and acquiring great games while developing online communities are not the giants' core competencies.

"We are working with game developers right now," retorted Churchill, pointing out that Command & Conquer is presently up and running in the UK. "We will be able to compete in every area."

While the companies in this arena might be publicly arguing over whose content, technology, performance, and community are better, they're privately talking and not ruling out anything. Who would have predicted Mpath and Catapult would merge, as they did last summer?

"There are strange bedfellows in this business—today's enemy is tomorrow's partner," said Steve Bradbury, Engage vice president of marketing. "Have conversations been going on? We've been contacted by and talked with most everybody." Engage, the Interplay spin-off, is just about ready to launch over America Online.

Meanwhile, game companies are adding areas to their Web sites so that people can find opponents without a middleman. Electronic Arts, Activision, and Blizzard are among those implementing this approach, and GTE Entertainment will soon follow suit.

Not to be left out of the fray, mainstream online services like America Online and CompuServe are taking steps to stay in the online multiplayer game, including broadening original content beyond RPGs and card and board games. ImagiNation Network will launch its new CyberPark interface on AOL shortly, and CompuServe has revamped its whole games area and is adding games by the handful. The big mainstream services, however, look to stick with latency-tolerant offerings, and don't have plans to connect people in popular off-the-shelf games the way TEN does with Duke or Mpath does with Quake.

That online multiplayer gaming is going to be big doesn't seem the question anymore; now it's what direction will it take, and who will emerge as the dominant player?

—Willem Knibbe

The Need for Speed

Latency? What's that? Companies hope to make the "L" word as outdated as a 2400bps modem, with high-speed-access technologies that will be a boon for online gamers–eventually.

Microsoft and GTE are among the companies testing ADSL, Asymmetrical Digital Subscriber Line. It's a technology that uses existing phone lines for high-speed data access–as much as 1.5 megabits per second (mbps), about 50 times as fast as a 28.8Kbps modem. The companies will later test modems that go up to 6mbps.

That's the good news. The bad news is that there are no ADSL standards yet, so the specialized modems only work with each other, and they're $2,500 a pair. An optimistic GTE spokesperson suggests that within two to three years, a pair of modems might be available for as little as $500.

The broadband buzz is once again picking up steam as @Home tests its cable modem service. This technology, which the company believes will be in thousands of homes by the end of this year and millions by 1998, can offer access speeds from 5mbps to 30mbps. (ISDN lines are 128Kbps.) And while ADSL testers are focusing on corporate applications first, @Home is looking at gaming from the start.

"We see gaming as a critical next-generation application," said Jason Rubinstein, @Home's product manager of premium services. "It's the first time a network is being created from scratch with the thinking that games are a key part of it. We're going to offer reliability and speed you can't get on a telecommunications-based system. We ran a test the other day where we had only 60ms of coast-to-coast latency."

@Home recently announced its first 60 affiliates, and among them was Total Entertainment Network. Affiliates will develop specialized content and receive promotion on the @Home network.

ADSL and cable modems are exciting advances, but don't throw out your 28.8Kbps modem yet. Depending on whom you talk to, estimates for when these technologies will be available as affordable mass-market products range from 2 to 10 years. *–WK*

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First-Person-Shooter Shakeup

It's been more frantic than an eight-player Dukematch down in Texas, with heavyweights in the 3D shoot-'em-up genre leaving companies, forming companies, and negotiating development deals.

First, Doom and Quake co-creator John Romero amicably left id Software to form his own company, Dream Design. This new outfit will license Quake technology as well as develop games outside the first-person-shooter genre.

Then several key members of the Duke Nukem 3D and Prey teams left Apogee/3D Realms to form their own company, Hipnotic Interactive.

"We had a few problems with [Apogee/3D Realms] as far as compensation, both creatively and financially," said Mark Dochtermann, co-founder and president of the new Dallas-based company and former programmer at 3D Realms. "It was for our own future that we took this step."

On a Monday in late August—Apogee's Black Monday, some call it—programmers Dochtermann and

Quake and Duke will have some competition once Dream Design and Hipnotic get rolling.

scouting REPORT

EA to Distribute Firaxis Titles

Firaxis Software Inc., the new company formed by industry giants Sid Meier, Jeff Briggs, and Brian Reynolds, will be an exclusive developer for Electronic Arts' Origin label.

The trio, made famous by Sid Meier's Civilization titles, left MicroProse to form Firaxis in June (see "Game Gurus Hit the Road," page 19, October 1996).

SimulEyes Garnering Industry Support

StereoGraphics' SimulEyes 3D glasses will be supported by such graphics-card firms as S3, Rendition, miro Computer Products, and Alliance. The makers of SimulEyes also say that 50 games that support the product are currently in development by such firms as Interplay, Nova Logic, and Eidos Interactive. The $129.95 glasses now ship with three levels of Descent II, a Whiplash track, eight levels of In Pursuit of Greed, and the complete versions of Rise of the Triad and Slipstream 5000. (StereoGraphics, 800-746-3937, www.stereographics.com)

Let the Battles Continue

TalonSoft, publisher of the Battleground series, has two new wargames for its holiday slate. First up is the next installment in the company's flagship series, Battleground 5: Antietam, which continues the Civil War action of Battleground 4: Shiloh. Also in the works is Age of Sail, a real-time naval wargame that will offer action-oriented engagements between 1775 and 1820 and include most of the significant surface actions of the era. (TalonSoft; 410-933-9191; www.talonsoft.com)

continued on page 30

3D Realms Games Delayed

While Blood and Shadow Warrior face delays, Apogee and its 3D Realms label will concentrate internal resources on their core 3D titles.

"Internally, we'll become a 3D Realms shop doing [Duke and Prey] because 3D games are the hot item, so that's what we're focusing on," said Apogee president Scott Miller. "Our goal is not to develop quantities of titles, but to do high-quality games."

Apogee will still oversee some outside projects, but internally it's going to be all 3D Realms' Prey and Duke.

Prey is now a '98 title, and Shadow Warrior faces a delay because resources were shifted to finishing the Duke Plutonium pack. Shadow's shareware should be out by year's end, with the full version arriving in February or so. Given the company's two-line focus, any sequels will likely be developed out of house, Miller said.

Blood is also taking longer than expected. It's being developed by Q Studios and uses the BUILD engine but will feature "a much truer 3D environment," Miller said. "And we've got a new thing we're calling 3D sprites. We think they look better than polygons." Blood should be out by March '97.

The Duke Plutonium add-on pack should be out now. Apogee is also working on a special Christmas Duke.

"It's a little three-level fun thing where it's Duke vs. Santa Claus," Miller explained. "You know, the evil aliens, before they got their butts kicked, messed up Santa and the elves and rangers."

By year's end, the company will start work on the sequel to Duke, which should be out by late 1998, Miller said.

–WK

Jim Dose', graphic artists Robert Atkins and Michael Hadwin, and levelord Richard Gray turned in their resignations. Following that surprising development, Prey producer Tom Hall left to join Romero's Dream Design. Both were id Software founders. It's expected Romero will concentrate on games in the Quake tradition, while Hall will develop Commander Keane-ish games.

Apogee president Scott Miller insists it's business as usual and that the moves won't affect planned Duke Nukem add-ons. He admitted there was a chemistry problem with the folks who are now Hipnotic and said Hall's departure was mutually agreed upon.

"The Duke team is absolutely unaffected," Miller said. A Duke add-on called The Plutonium Pack was in its final stages at press time and should be in stores now. "It's 10 or 11 levels, with new weapons and enemies. We're basing it on popular movies like *Independence Day*, *The Rock* and *Mission: Impossible*."

Miller also said Prey, which was supposed to be a 1997 release, is unaffected.

"We have replacements lined up, enthusiastic people, so it's going to work out for the better," he said. "Our key [Prey] programmer, [William] Scarboro, is still here. Realistically, the project was a '98 project even six months ago, and that's probably the way it's going to pan out. We're so unconcerned about dates."

"They make it out like it's not a big deal," replied Hipnotic's Atkins. "But it's not a speed bump; it's a major deal. Prey basically has one programmer left, and that project's an incredibly long way away. And with Hall leaving, I'm sure others will join him at Romero's company. They'll be replacing half the staff in the next month. To me, that's not a speed bump."

Also joining Hipnotic are level designer Tom Mustain, who worked on Ultimate Doom, and Harry Miller, DWANGO co-founder.

Atkins said he and the others started talking about the move at May's Electronic Entertainment Expo. The timeframe was greatly accelerated, however, when they found out id would license the Quake technology.

Hipnotic's first job is a work-for-hire arrangement with id.

"We're going to be working on a level pack for Quake," Atkins said. "We're going to be doing things with the engine that they ran out of time to implement: new weapons, strategic weapons, a handful of new powerups, exploding walls. It'll be a retail product in about six months. After that, we'll start on our own project with the Quake technology."

Jay Wilbur, id's owner and biz guy, would only say he's in discussions with both new companies about licensing Quake technology, and that "we're currently looking into mission packs [that will ship] as soon as they're finished." —*Willem Knibbe*

LEADER BOARD

The best-selling PC games

RANKING	TITLE	LAST MONTH	MONTHS ON CHART	OUR RATING
1	**Duke Nukem 3D** (FormGen; 800-263-2390; DOS CD; $39.99)	1	3	A
2	**Warcraft II: Tides of Darkness** (Blizzard Entertainment; 800-953-7669; DOS CD; $50)	2	8	A
3	**Civilization II** (MicroProse; 800-879-7529; DOS CD; $49.99)	3	4	A
4	**Final Doom** (GT Interactive; 800-610-4847; DOS CD, Win 95 CD; $49.95)	–	–	C-
5	**Myst** (Brøderbund; 800-521-6263; Win CD; $54.95)	5	27	A
6	**Command & Conquer** (Virgin Interactive Entertainment; 800-874-4607; DOS CD; $59.95)	7	9	C
7	**Ultimate Doom: Thy Flesh Consumed** (GT Interactive; 800-610-4847; DOS CD; $30)	–	10	–
8	**Microsoft Return of Arcade** (Microsoft; 800-426-9400; Win 95 CD; $34.95)	6	3	C
9	**The Need for Speed** (Electronic Arts; 800-245-4525; DOS CD/Win 95 CD; $59.95)	–	3	B
10	**MechWarrior 2** (Activision; 800-477-3650; DOS CD; $44.95)	–	9	A-

Leader Board is a compilation of top-selling computer games in 1,300 retail stores for July 1996. "Months On Chart" does not necessarily indicate consecutive months. Source: PC Data

scouting REPORT

Creative Introduces New Speakers

Creative Labs, maker of the Sound Blaster card, will roll out a new line of Sound Blaster speakers manufactured by Samsung. The line will include four models priced between $14 and $99, catering to both novice buyers and high-end multimedia users.

The line consists of the $14 Sound Blaster CS46, a set of three-inch speakers with portable computers in mind; the $59 CS200, for more avid gamers; and the $99 SBS380 and SBW 500 subwoofers. (Creative Labs; 800-998-1000; www.creativelabs.com)

Best of the Lot

Sirtech Software has announced the release of The Trophy Case, a collection of three of the publisher's best-received games: Jagged Alliance, Druid: Daemons of the Mind, and Realms of Arkania: Star Trail. The package contains the games, their complete manuals, and demos of upcoming Sirtech releases. (Sirtech Software; 315-393-6451; www.sir-tech.com)

Gaming Yellow Pages

Check out the Web's very own Yellow Pages for the gaming industry at **www.vgol.com**. Maintained by Cyberactive Publishing, Video Games On-Line is a site devoted to providing complete and definitive links throughout the world of gaming, including developers, distributors, retailers, and media. The site contains a free gaming-specific search engine, and links are updated daily. (Cyberactive Publishing; 203-761-6165)

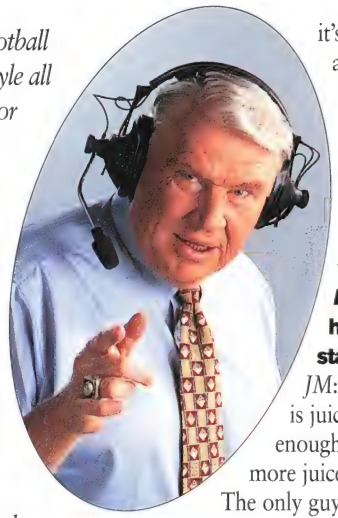
Card Wars

As video-card maker S3 announced the shipment of 1

continued on page 32

with John Madden

There's no mistaking a John Madden football telecast. Boom! Doink! Whap! He has a style all his own, whether describing a touchdown or using the telestrator to point out the best parts of the Thanksgiving turkey. The former Oakland Raiders football coach and current author, Fox broadcaster, and 10-time Emmy winner is welcomed into millions of homes on Sunday afternoons. Millions more play his video game, which started out 11 years ago as strategies and plays diagrammed during late-night train rides between NFL cities (he doesn't fly). The series has turned into a franchise for Electronic Arts: More than 7 million people have played it on consoles, and it's now available for the first time on the PC. News editor Willem Knibbe scored this exclusive interview with the football genius as he rolled down the highway in his custom bus, the Madden Cruiser.



***PC Games:* This year marks two firsts for the Madden series–it makes its move to the PC and includes your strategy primer, Madden University.**

John Madden: It's going to be a whole new thing. It is the best football game, and someone who loves the competition or loves the history of teams can play it. There's a lot of ways to be entertained and educated by it. Madden University is something we'd talked about for a few years just to kind of talk about football, talk some strategies for people who didn't read a book or stay up on it, to give a little extra understanding. We're going to expand on that; it's going to be bigger.

***PCG:* Were you more involved in this year's version?**

JM: I think so. I try to be a lot more involved in every year's version. My thing is, when someone plays it—whether it's a kid just learning the game, a boy or a girl, a high school kid or college kid, or pros playing, or pro coaches playing—that it's a game for everyone. And that was always my goal. I didn't want to make it so simple that people who are part of football would say it wasn't real, but I also wanted to make sure it wasn't so difficult that you couldn't just get in and play. It's a real thing, it's football as it's played, and everyone from all ages can employ the strategies and play the game. And the other thing I always wanted to do was kind of get it where you never get it. If it's too easy, then you become bored.

***PCG:* Do NFL players hassle you about their stats in the game?**

JM: Yeah, the word they use is juice—they don't have enough "juice", everyone wants more juice. They want to be faster. The only guy who complained that he had too much juice was Emmitt Smith. I rate players, and of course I have my favorites. To me Emmitt is the best running back in football. When we start putting that in the game, he's the best, but in last year's game, he may have been a little *too* good. Just the fact that he's the best, the computer took him to a level where he was almost impossible to tackle.

***PCG:* Do you play the Madden football games yourself?**

JM: I do, but what I do more is watch someone play to keep up the credibility of the game. To be honest, I'm not a good player. I think the younger the person, the better they play. I know more about the strategy and the game than anyone—I know it from when it was just an idea on a piece of paper—but any kid who can play could beat me, and that kind of upsets me [laughs].

***PCG:* What are your favorite strategies in this year's version?**

JM: I like to mix it up. If you do one thing all the time, it shouldn't work. My strategy and the strategy I try to get in the game is mixture. But I love any way to get deep, I want to throw it deep. If you can get it all the way down there in a couple plays, why chip away? I think to really be good in football and to be good in this year's game, you have to be able to pass. We are the pro game. Running isn't as big a thing in the NFL now. Being able to get the right people in there in the right situations and being able to throw the ball is the strategy. If you can pass, just like if you can pass in the NFL, you'll win. If you can't pass, you're in trouble.

SegaSoft gets Serious About the PC Market

The lush land of Rocket Science's Obsidian will be brought to you by SegaSoft.

SegaSoft has big ambitions for the PC market. Thus far, ambitions are pretty much all it's had, with fortunes hinging principally on its port of Virtua Fighter.

But this Christmas, SegaSoft should make some headway into the PC market. Among its slate of upcoming games are two visually stunning shoot-'em-ups, Virtua Cop and Scud: The Disposable Assassin, and a quartet of games from developer Rocket Science Games, with whom SegaSoft has announced a distribution deal.

Everyone knows Sega's classic Virtua Cop. Scud: The Disposable Assassin may be familiar to fans of Rob Schrab's hot underground comic book about a robotic hitman purchased from a vending machine. John Malkovich supplies Scud's voice, fulfilling a dream of the comic's creator. (Oliver Stone owns the screen rights.)

Emperor of the Fading Suns takes you to the Second Dark Age of mankind in the year 5023 A.D. While humanity has spread among the stars, a new medieval order has inherited power as a Royal House, Merchant League, and Church struggle for supremacy. The game will offer multiplayer support, ground and space combat, and all kinds of intriguing goodies like assassination, backdoor politicking, and occultism.

But SegaSoft's highest hopes may be pinned on Rocket Science Games, the San Francisco–based developer whose own promise has yet to be fulfilled.

SegaSoft will distribute three Rocket Science titles this Christmas, with a fourth to come in 1997. The Rocket Science slate includes Obsidian, a non-linear puzzle adventure with five hallucinatory realms rendered with dazzling graphics.

Also included in the distribution deal are Rocket Jockey, a futuristic arena combat game featuring high-tech rocket gladiators, and The Space Bar, a tongue-in-cheek sci-fi adventure that puts you in charge of a comical murder investigation on the planet Armpit VI.

A fourth Rocket Science game for distribution in 1997 has yet to be determined.

—Daniel Morris

DreamWorks Opens Curtain on First Game

DreamWorks Interactive, the company Steven Spielberg co-founded last year, is ready to make its debut–and break new gaming ground–with The Neverhood: A Curious Wad of Klay Finds His Soul.

Doug TenNapel, of Earthworm Jim fame, used more than three tons of clay to create the elaborate sets of The Neverhood and painstakingly stop-frame-animated every creature in the fantastical environment.

As Klaymen, you're out to stop the evil Klogg's attempt to take over a wacky world that was created by Hoborg, a lonely ruler whose magical clay grants life to its newly formed sculptures. Trying to thwart Klogg and find the meaning of your existence will take you through about 60

puzzles, but you won't have to worry about dying. If you lose a head or an arm or a leg, no problem: since you're clay, you just grow a new one.

The Neverhood is expected to be priced at $54.95 and should be in stores by November 17.

–Willem Knibbe

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Let the Parroty Begin

Is nothing in computer gaming sacred? Anyone and everyone could become a target, Parroty says.

For those who wondered how Myst Island could endure millions of visitors and not become a tourist dump, Palladium Interactive's new humor division, Parroty Interactive, offers a tongue-in-cheek revisionist take on PC gaming's biggest cultural phenomenon.

PYST, an "interactive parody," promises to take all that may have been sacred and spellbinding about Broderbund's wayfaring classic and turn it into fodder for funnies.

John Goodman is on board as King Mattruss, who rules PYST Island with the help of his sons, Prince Syrup and the Prince Formerly Known as Prince. Instead of heavenly scenery and John Tesh music, the island wanderer will encounter trailer parks, water slides, and graffiti—all the tourist traffic has turned the tropical paradise into a blight! You can click your way through 10 scenes of animations and video and audio clips.

Parroty Interactive's maiden launch will be accompanied by a Web site devoted to all things sarcastic and satiric. The site, at **www.pyst.com**, will not be limited to Myst-bashing, either. It will feature areas with chat rooms for all the cynical dishing you can handle, plus links to various comedy sites around the Web.

The release of PYST will also be accompanied by a PSYT enhanced CD single, the "Theme from PYST" (sung by Goodman, no less), and a "Making of PYST" video.

Electronic Arts will be distributing PYST and future Parroty titles. While the company won't yet spill the beans on which industry standards are next in line to receive their drubbing, Parroty does promise a series of parodies aimed straight for the jugular—and funny bone. (Parroty Interactive; 415-464-5500; www.pyst.com; Win/Mac CD; $14.95) *—Daniel Morris*

scouting REPORT

million of its ViRGE 3D graphics/video accelerator, competitor ATI Technologies announced price reductions.

ATI will reduce the price of its 3D Xpression and Video Xpression cards by 22 and 34 percent, respectively, while making similar slashes to the price of the Graphics Xpression and Graphics Pro Turbo cards. (S3, 408-980-5400; ATI Technologies, 905-882-2600)

Pax Imperia 2 Gets a New Home

Blizzard Entertainment has sold to T•HQ all rights to Pax Imperia 2. Calabasas, Calif.-based T•HQ's recent acquisition of Heliotrope Studios, the developer of the original Pax Imperia, made acquiring the rights to the sequel of the popular space-faring combat game a must.

SCI in Three Dimensions

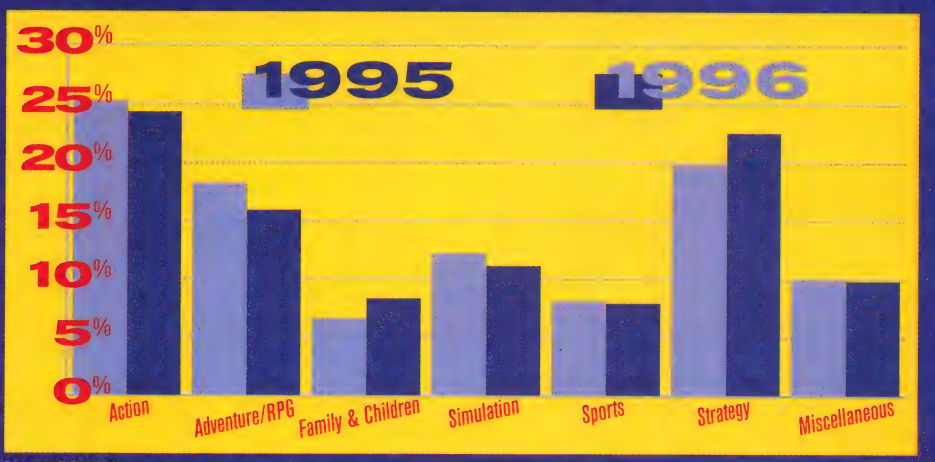
Sales Curve Interactive, the name behind the offbeat Gender Wars and Kingdom o' Magic, will soon be bringing 3D action to the PC.

Carmageddon puts you behind the wheel of a made-for-battle road racer in a league where foul play is not only tolerated, but encouraged. The game will feature multiplayer support, realistic driving physics, and user-definable camera angles.

Swiv, a remake of the classic side-scrolling helicopter/dune buggy game, finds you enlisted to help fight in a futuristic American civil war. You'll hop from gunship to dune buggy and back as you plow through rebels who have kidnapped your daughter. (Sales Curve Interactive; 800-292-3797; www.sci.co.uk)

Genre Jousting

There's a title for every taste in this crowded games market, but which genres dominate? Action and strategy titles, says market research firm PC Data. Here's a look at each genre's 1995 and 1996 (through July) total unit game sales.



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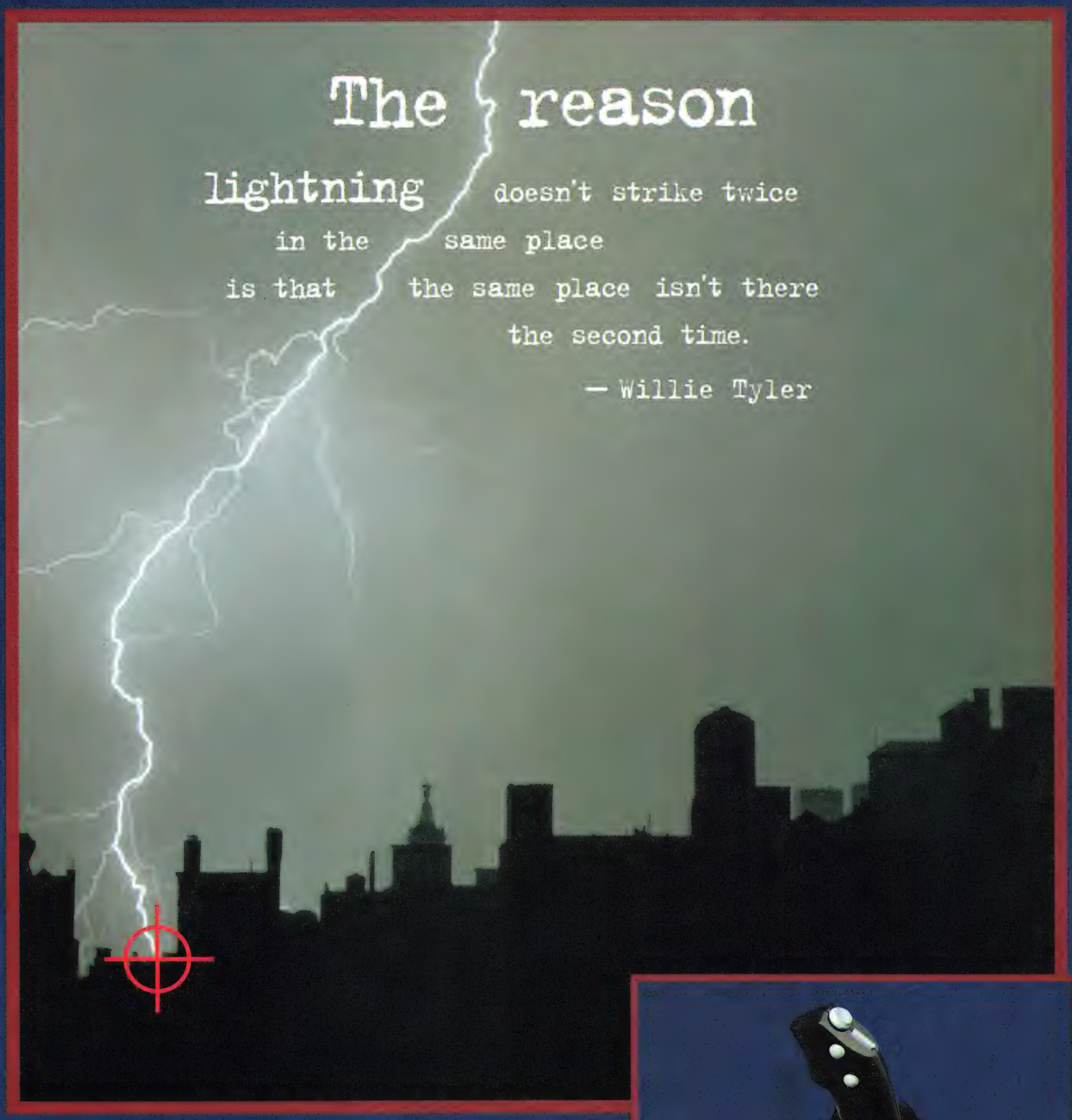

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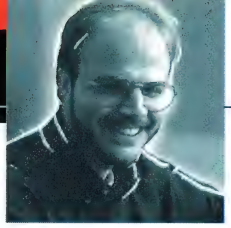

Steve Klett

Golden Turkey Time

As we head into November, people's thoughts naturally drift toward lazy Sunday afternoons spent watching football and plans for a delicious turkey feast with family and friends on Thanksgiving.

Turkey? Did someone say turkey? The Player knows turkey: the hordes of horrendous titles he's been forced to sit through over the past year. Thoughts of vengeance fill his head; the satisfaction of slamming the games in reviews wasn't enough. Join him as he ruffles a few feathers and hands out the First Annual Golden Turkey awards.

There are no rules. To win, vendors merely had to commit some inane act in pursuit of a quick buck that gave consumers a headache. Now that you're all holding your breath with anticipation, and without any further ado, here are the winners in no particular order.

"Games"

The first category to receive awards is the largest: bad, bad games. How bad were they? So bad that many of the companies responsible for them were—if they had any conscience at all—happy to get a D instead of an F in their reviews.

First up is Philips Media for its **The Improv Presents: Don't Quit Your Day Job**, which you'll find properly reviewed on page 120 of this issue. This "comedic" adventure, which tasks you with getting your budding comedian clients a gig at the Improv, was not funny, devoid of anything resembling gameplay, and filled with lousy acting and production values. What were they thinking?

Next up is Mindscape's **Cyberspeed**—a futuristic racing game in which you don't have full control of the action. Yeah, a railed racing game, in effect. Now that's fun.

The Player couldn't decide what was the worst fighting game of the year, so it's a tie between Atlantean's **Catfight** and Microforum's **Expect No Mercy**. You know it's bad when Catfight makes you think Atlantean's Alleycats strip bowling title was a better game. The best thing No Mercy had going for it was its disgusting ad campaign.

The sports genre steps up for its Golden Turkeys like a champion, with not one, not two, but three winners: Merit's **World Hockey**, Time Warner's **Wayne Gretzky and the NHLPA Allstars** (sorry, Great One, but why did you agree to put your name on such a bad game?), and Interactive Magic's **Decathlon**. The first two titles lack anything resembling AI, and the latter is simply so dull and obviously rushed out to capitalize on the Olympics that it's laughable.

The Player never thought Sanctuary Woods' quality Lion sim would spawn a clone. Can there really be more than one sim about the king of the jungle? Discovery Channel Multimedia thought so, and jumped on the bandwagon with the poorly done **Savage**.

Finally, there's **Final Doom**, fittingly wrapping up the awards for the game category. The Player may take extra special heat for handing out this Turkey, but all he has to say about this one is Thank God It's Final. Are people really still playing this game when there's Duke and Quake?

Yeah, Right

Time Warner Interactive garners its second Golden Gobbler for **Return Fire**—not because it's a bad game, but because the company left out network and modem play options *and then* tried to pass off its omission "as an effort to foster friendships between players by making them play at the same keyboard." Ha! Nice try. The Player wasn't born yesterday. Maybe the day before, but not yesterday.

Real or Memorex?

Next on The Player's list are vaporgames—those titles that continually fail to ship for one reason or another. This category has a hands-down winner: Take2 Interactive's **Battlecruiser 3000 A.D.** This title is so late (more than three years) that The Player forgets—and doesn't want to remember—when it was originally supposed to come out. It's possible it may actually appear by the time you're reading this, but don't hold your breath. Avalon Hill gets a runner-up Golden Turkey Baster for two titles yet to hit shelves: **Third Reich** and **Over the Reich.**

Please Pass the IQ

Solid artificial intelligence is crucial in a strategy game if it is to have any value as a single-player game. Sierra On-Line wins a Turkey for forgetting this with the release of **The Rise & Rule of Ancient Empires**, which had the IQ of a brick.

King of the Golden Turkeys

The biggest Golden Turkey award goes to the company that has put out so many bad and ho-hum titles that it deserves extra special recognition. This year the winner is Acclaim. The list of lackluster titles amazes: Batman Forever, Striker, Judge Dredd, D, College Slam, Separation Anxiety, and Revolution X. It may be a console and arcade giant, but Acclaim has yet to prove itself on the PC platform.

The Player could go on and on, but he's outta room. As he sits back to wait for the holiday greeting cards this awards ceremony is sure to generate, he'd like to remind those vendors that didn't win that there's always next year.

Send your comments, complaints, and Golden Turkey submissions to Sklett@pcgamesmag.com.

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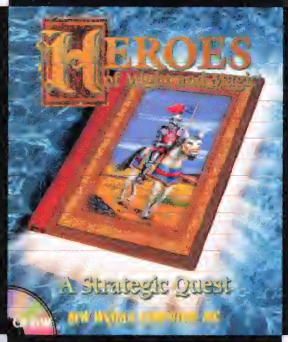
Here's a bunch

Pick your poison: Russia's premier helicopter, the Werewolf, or the U.S.'s 21st-century Comanche. Either way, you're a flying fool, with more realism packed into two CDs than a tower buzz at Baghdad Airport. Motion sickness bag not included. From NovaLogic.

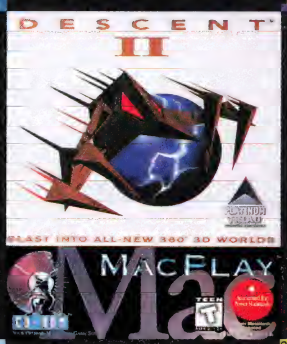
MechWarrior 2 puts you in control of the BattleMech, the awesome 31st-century war machine. Customize one of 15 Mechs to fight in over 30 challenging missions against enemy Mechs. Ascend the ranks of your clan to become the ultimate MechWarrior. From Activision.

Heroes brings out the warlord in you—a fantasy/strategy game that puts you in command, recruiting heroes and their forces to battle up to three human or computer adversaries. What's at stake? Only the entire world, as you know it. From New World Computing.



Gabriel Knight, the hero of the spine-tingling "Sins of the Father," scares the living pants off us once again as he solves this multiple mutilation murder tale, The Beast Within. You'll leave every light on in the house for a week after this one. From Sierra On-Line.

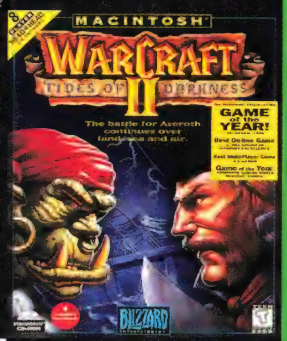
Never again feel the loss associated with finishing a game of Marathon. The third chapter brings it all full circle, and Bungie's own editing tools give you limitless power to create the adventures. We still recommend retina breaks every 30 hours or so. From Bungie.

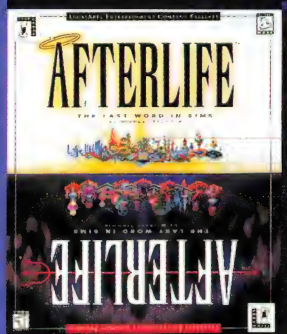


Descent II's new 360° 3-D animation will keep you glued to the screen for hours as you battle an armada of crazed robots. You'll tap into a ton of cool, high-tech weaponry and all the wits and reflexes you can muster as you try to fight off the onslaught. From MacPlay.

Did you know that there's an actual strategy to going 220 mph? It's all laid out here, plus you can race to your heart's content with no fear of losing your license or melting a crankshaft. IndyCar is virtual decadence at its self-absorbed best. From Sierra On-Line.

WarCraft II, the best-selling PC game, now explodes on the Macintosh. Take command of either the ruthless Ocrs or the noble humans in your quest to rule the land of Azeroth. Make powerful new allies, battle terrifying new creatures, conquer new lands. From Blizzard Entertainment.





Become the omnipotent, godlike and somewhat goofy ruler of your own kingdom as you determine the final resting place of your "souls." Afterlife will have you laughing, or screaming, or possibly both as you try to figure out what to do with your new friends. From Lucas Arts.

Full Tilt! Pinball is as real as it gets. A truly realistic pinball experience on a computer. Accept the challenge of three mesmerizing pinball tables, each with its own photorealistic 3-D graphics, incredible sound effects and accurately modeled ball movement. From Maxis, Inc.

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of cool games for the Mac. Even though research tells us you'll have a favorite and compulsively play it 46,658 times.

like Best Buy and CompUSA (understanding, of course, that leaving the house is unavoidable if you want to visit one of the stores). In fact, just short of beaming game code directly into your cerebral cortex via satellite, you can get your hands on the really good stuff almost any way you want. To begin your obsession with Mac software and to check out all these different ways to buy, get on the Internet and plant yourself in front of our web site at http://www.macsoftware.apple.com. Or, if you're into tradition, **call 800-500-4862**

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Peter Olafson

Ares is a Mac Star

Among space combat games, Accolade's classic Star Control knows few equals.

But that changes with Changeling's Ares, and it's created just for the Mac. Imagine an action/strategy game with roots in Star Control's combat mode that's expanded to include multi-ship operations and production, and you'll have a taste of what's afoot in the forthcoming Ares.

This mission-based space opera starts out as a pure action game. You're given a single heavy cruiser and a job—blow up four well-defended sensor relay dishes—and sent off toward a dotted red line of enemy installations. As they close in, so does the overhead view. You're expected...and outnumbered.

Easy to control but hard to play well, Ares grows deeper as it grows on you. As the game progresses, you'll receive messages from other ships, build your own, and give orders (a little bit in the fashion of Wing Commander's wingman commands).

One of the 35 safes in Daydream's elegant QuickTime VR Safecracker.

It's a great, stylish action game, and you'll find an amazing level of polish in the small details: the instructions that set up each mission; the small, picture-perfect explosions and the rotating bits of debris they leave in their wake; the swift, disappointed exit of defeated enemies; and the fluid zoom of the map gridwork as you approach and retreat from enemy ships and installations. You really feel like you're at a command console.

I suspect you'll be at it for a good long time. The difficulty level is nice and stiff, and random elements have been introduced in the scenario setup that will make repeating past successes an iffy business. On the second mission, you won't have destroyed two of the required four radar dishes before a much larger ship with a large supply of homing missiles takes up a relentless pursuit. What do you do, hotshot? What do you do? (Changeling Software; 800-769-2768; www.changeling.com; $45–$50) (**A**)

Safecracker: This one is a solid example of how sticking to a theme gives a game sweet consistency.

Swedish developer Daydream has built the first full QuickTime VR game around a range of antique safes—each with a unique combination—and between these locked-door puzzles and the large office building that contains them, they've created a lush, intelligent, and fluid graphic adventure. Corruption can be fun.

QuickTime VR is a big part of that fun. You're still moving in steps from location to location, but QTVR allows the player to pan in a continuous circle—as well as up and down about 30 degrees—while preserving a high level of graphic detail. It's the next best thing to being there.

Safecracker is very much a Macintosh game. (It's being ported to Windows.) Macs abound within the game—along with other interesting gadgets—and you can even log on to one and play games. Do Dark Horses, Pysst, and Jellied in Slime ring any bells? (Inscape; 800-510-1791; www.inscape.com; $39.95) (**A-**)

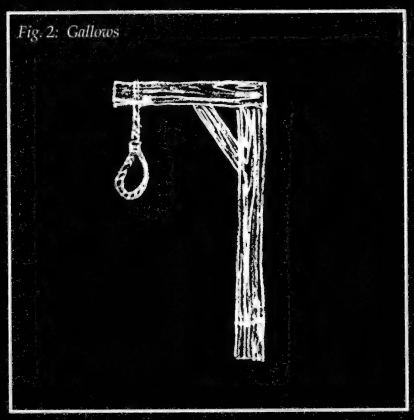
9: Happily, you've inherited a resort. Unhappily, the place turns out to be a nasty toy box full of nightmarish images and sounds and a thicket of puzzles. A lot of big show-business names are attached to this adventure, including Robert De Niro, Aerosmith, and Christopher Reeve. But it's the game's imagery that stuck with me through the day and followed me to bed, particularly the grizzled head of a garrulous pilot riding atop a toy plane. He scares me. When I interrupt him by moving to another location, he sounds as though he's been interrupted. I know I'll see him in my dreams, and I know he came out of someone else's. (GT Interactive; 800-610-4847; www.gtinteractive.com; $49.95) (**A-**)

ZPC—No Flesh Shall Be Spared: You can't say ZPC is riding on Bungie's coattails. The first non-Bungie release to use the Marathon engine looks nothing like that great Mac action game. In fact, it looks more like one of those short, Spartan animations that turns up occasionally on MTV.

Sure, it's still a 3D shoot-'em-up with the familiar key layout. But the in-game graphics and the cut-scene animations that link the chapters have an almost folk-art quality. Your default weapon is a strange refracting transparency. And some of the characters will talk to you. Can high art also be fun? It's too early to say—this preview version wasn't ready for prime time—but the results so far are strange...and strangely promising. (GT Interactive; 800-610-4847; www.gtinteractive.com; $49.95)

Abuse: An atmospheric running, jumping, and shooting game. My complaint about the unevenness of the graphics endures in this port, but so does my delight with its intricacies—the big one being the ability to shoot in almost any direction you choose. It's slated to come with a level editor, which wasn't ready at press time. (Bungie Software; 800-295-0060; www.bungie.com; $34.99) (**B+**)

The Beast Within: Am I the only one who thinks this wolfish six-CD follow-up to Gabriel Knight is sort of lackluster? The use of real-world backdrops turns it from animated adventure into an FMV game. I found myself increasingly annoyed by Gabriel's laid-back fidgeting, the game's tendency to lock up and crash, and the story's travelogue bent (historic Munich on CD). (Sierra On-Line; 800-757-7707; www.sierra.com; $54.95) (**C-**)



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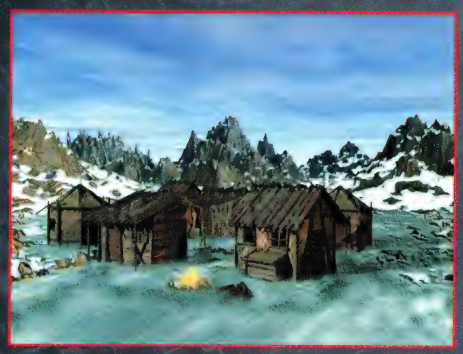

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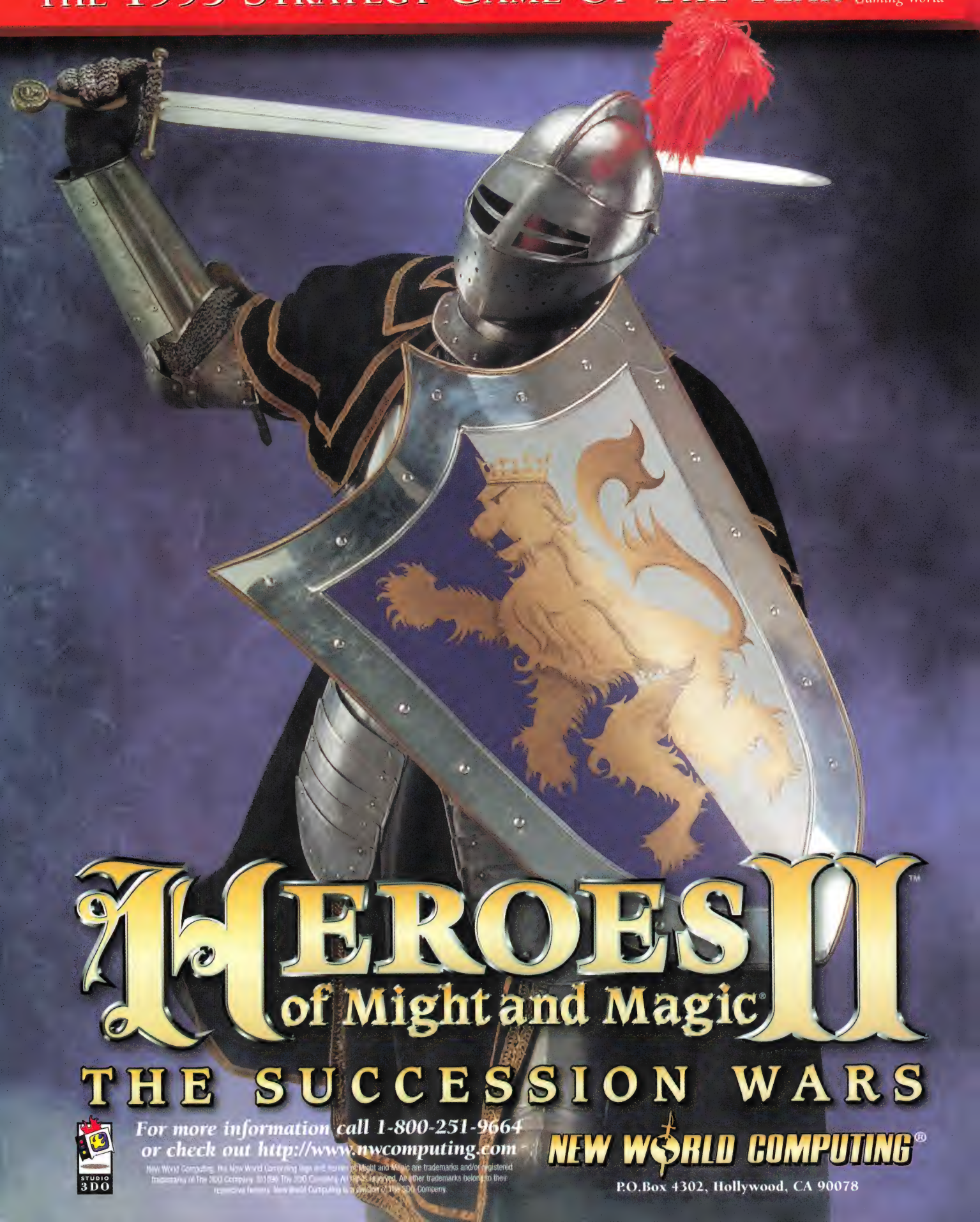

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In the beginning there was Dune 2. And it was good. And it sold well. Then there was Command and Conquer, Warcraft, and Warcraft II. And they were better. And they sold millions. Gamers around the world rejoiced in their real-time wars. Software developers spake thus: "We can do that." And that they are doing. And their offerings shall be many and varied. Here beginneth

THE REAL-TIME BATTLEGROUND

BY ROB SMITH

Was it the obedient call of "Yes, sir"? Was it the power of hearing "You got it" to every command? Whatever it was, Command and Conquer (C&C) tapped into the order-bellowing psyche of amateur generals the world over and thrust the wargame out of the plodding, dust-covered, turn-based closet into a real-time action frenzy.

Virgin's Dune 2 had already brought real-time strategy to the PC, and while it was a solid, entertaining game, it didn't light any fires. Westwood updated the concept for the newer, bigger, more powerful PCs, and added an engaging install program, amazing cinematic cut sequences, and multiplayer options. The result was C&C, and it was a phenomenon. Likewise, Blizzard Entertainment had enjoyed nominal success with Warcraft: Orcs & Humans, and the company turned the corner into the realm of classic status with Warcraft II: Tides of Darkness. More recently, Z raised the standard even further with its wise-ass attitude and challenging gameplay.

Developers had found a rich vein of enthusiasm among gamers. Naturally, these companies saw an area ripe for exploitation, and—never ones to look a gift horse in the mouth—jumped into the saddle. The upshot is a slew of real-time strategy games, each offering slightly different angles on the theme.

Whether it's single-player missions against computer-controlled opponents with advanced AI or the prospect of slaughtering friends in multiplayer games, there are going to be plenty of real-time strategy options in the coming months.

■ An Imperium VTOL opens fire on a Freedom Guard convoy.

IMPERIUM (WORKING TITLE)

Activision

Available December '96

In the competitive marketplace of the real-time strategy game, keeping a tight lid on what's going to make your game original can be vital. Luckily, we were able to pry open a few of these lids for you, including an exclusive first look at Imperium (working title)—an upcoming real-time combat game developed by Australis and published by Activision. This one looks hot!

In the year 2607, the Imperium and the Freedom Guard are preparing for an epic space battle. As a renegade member of a pacifist offshoot of these two factions, you stumble on a damaged probe that lets you see the battles raging between the two sides. More importantly, it lets you pick which side you want to root for and control their forces.

■ A power plant is about to fall to the enemy air assault.

■ The Imperium attempts to hold off a Freedom Guard strike force.

■ A Freedom Guard hover transport is ambushed by Imperium forces.

According to Trey Watkins, lead game designer, "Imperium will build on the success of other strategy games and, with an interface designed for multiplayer speed, will bring fast action to the strategy elements. A complex game engine is going to allow for real-time elevations in the terrain, and real-time line-of-sight will simulate a realistic battleground rather than just a map in a computer game. Both of these elements will affect the movement and attacking attributes of the units. The elevation factor will prove crucial in strategy development, as the high point of an area can act as a great scouting post and offer the best available visibility range."

Fifteen engagements—which you can play as either side—will require expert management of the 40 different unit types. Building units won't involve long periods of time spent scrolling tediously through options. With 20 unit types on each of two screens, building your forces is just a click away. Watkins revealed that one unit type, on the Imperium side, is the Hostage Taker. This armored personnel carrier has mounted pincers on the front that run over the infantry, drag them inside, lobotomize them, strap a bomb to their bodies, and then send them off as suicide bombers!

Eight-player support over LANs and the Internet is where Imperium is really focused. A terrain editor will allow players to build and animate new maps and new unit types, and then upload or swap them between friends. Activision plans ongoing development: By the day of the game's release, new maps will already be available for download from the company's Web site.

With formation movement of the units, waypoints, and special orders that include harassment (roving units pick off enemies from a distance and then run away when pursued), there is a huge scope for multifaceted attacks.

An 8MB Pentium will be able to cope with the 640-by-480–resolution maps covering a 64-screen area. Power-mongers with 16MB or more should be able to take advantage of maps double this size, offering tremendous scope for sustained, detailed strategic combat.

GAME	CO.	PRICE	SHIP	WEB
Imperium	Activision	Not yet priced	Late 1996	www.activision.com
Starcraft	Blizzard Entertainment	$50	Q1 '97	www.blizzard.com
Command & Conquer: Red Alert	Westwood Studios	Not yet priced	Oct. '96	www.westwood.com
X-COM: Apocalypse	MicroProse	Not yet priced	Early 1997	www.microprose.com
War Wind	Strategic Simulations Inc.	$50	Oct. '96	www..ssionline.com
Forgotten Realms: Blood & Magic	Interplay	$49.95	Sept. '96	www.interplay.com
BattleTech: Honor Bound	MicroProse	Not yet priced	1997	www.microprose.com
Enemy Nations	Viacom New Media	Not yet priced	Nov. '96	www.viacomnewmedia.com
M.A.X.: Mechanized Assault and Exploration	Interplay	$49.95	Christmas '96	www.interplay.com

Live Announcers

"Now here's the leader, driving on 17..."

"And WOW, he really smacked that one..."

"Yes—but it looks to me like it's slicing way left..."

STARCRAFT

Blizzard Entertainment
Available Fall '97

With Warcraft II: Tides of Darkness, Blizzard enjoyed an unqualified hit. The Beyond the Dark Portal expansion pack supplied the almost obligatory extra missions but will be the last of the expansion sets. There are bigger and better things in the pipeline, and while one of them is Warcraft III, Starcraft is nearer to completion.

On hearing about this game, it would be easy to dismiss Starcraft as simply Warcraft II in space. If this is the end result, Blizzard will consider its task a failure. Its intention is to take the good points of Warcraft II—and there are many—and add a whole bunch more.

Of course, Starcraft will show off Blizzard's penchant for weaving a respectable story into the mayhem. Three interstellar empires have existed, if not flourished, for decades. The Terrans have long suspected Protoss of a subtle domination plan on the fringes of the galaxy, but now their offensive is obvious. Historically, the Terrans have been divided by petty squabbles. Now it's time to put those damaging conflicts behind them and unite against a common enemy.

If only it were that simple. Another alien species, the Zurg,

■ **The Protoss attack Terran marines.**

■ **A Terran patrol catches a pair of Protoss Scouts attempting to skirt the defensive perimeter. One is instantly dispatched...**

■ **A Protoss carrier, escorted by two Arbiters, oversees the advance of a cadre of Dragoons.**

A REAL-TIME MELTING POT

Forgotten Realms: Blood & Magic

Interplay
Available now

Real-time combat action comes to the AD&D Forgotten Realms universe in this character-based strategy, already available in stores. Rather than the large armies of good and evil doing battle, Blood Magic focuses on individuals. Over the course of the five stories spanning 16 realms, you will develop up to 28 characters whose abilities—and powers—increase.

This focus on the individual also takes the battles from wide-open plains to the confines of town streets and dungeons. Perilous quests in the great tradition of these settings will throw 30 different creatures across your path.

While the scale of this game is different from C&C/Warcraft types, the gameplay strategies are the same. Positioning, tactics, and timing assaults are crucial to your success.

BattleTech: Honor Bound

MicroProse
Available next year

FASA's tabletop mech battle game is getting turned into a Windows 95 real-time strategy game by the company's Interactive Technologies division. Honor Bound is set on the planet Coventry, where you are in charge of a lance of BattleMechs. The Jade Falcon Clan holds all the aces and needs defeating. Resource management is a vital component to the gameplay, setting a backdrop to the isometric-view battlegrounds.

Enemy Nations

Viacom New Media
Available now

Resource management plays an important role in this real-time strategy combat game, which can be played against astute computer opponents or in mass battles over the Internet. Multiple onscreen windows let you view various parts of the

also plans to play a part in what will become an epic struggle for survival. Each of the three races has developed its own technologies and exhibits unique, race-specific abilities. These attributes need to be carefully balanced to turn a random bunch of machines and weapons into an effective fighting force. And you're calling the shots.

Thirty missions gradually bring the full flavor of the storyline to the fore as battles rage in space, on alien planets, and in the confines of command stations. Each area carries its own potential problems and strategic requirements, adding real depth to the gameplay.

Of course, there's a multiplayer option that lets eight players battle it out over a modem, LAN, or the Internet. Of particular interest is Blizzard's battle.net, a free server requiring just a standard Internet connection. This service will allow commanders to take on all comers from around the gaming globe.

Needless to say, Starcraft looks to be a big hit.

COMMAND & CONQUER: RED ALERT

Westwood Studios
Available Christmas '96

C&C caused controversy in numerous areas within the games industry. A highly controversial ad campaign in Britain featuring photos of Hitler, Stalin, and Radovan Karadic accompanied by the slogan "Previous high scorers" helped the hype. It paid off with impressive sales, but then there was the backlash against an AI too susceptible to manipulation. (Who hasn't tried the old moving-sandbag-wall trick?)

Red Alert plans to address C&C's

■ **Basic unit types will be joined by specialist attack units.**

battle and build areas as you struggle to keep your own nation happy and defeat your enemies.

M.A.X.: Mechanized Assault and Exploration

Interplay
Available Christmas '96

Just about creeping into this real-time battleground is M.A.X. Highlighting the different approaches developers are taking to this genre, M.A.X. uses a "concurrent turn-based" method of dealing with the strategies. The world as we know it has ended and humankind has split into eight factions and taken to space. Twenty-four different worlds provide the battlegrounds as the clans fight for dominance.

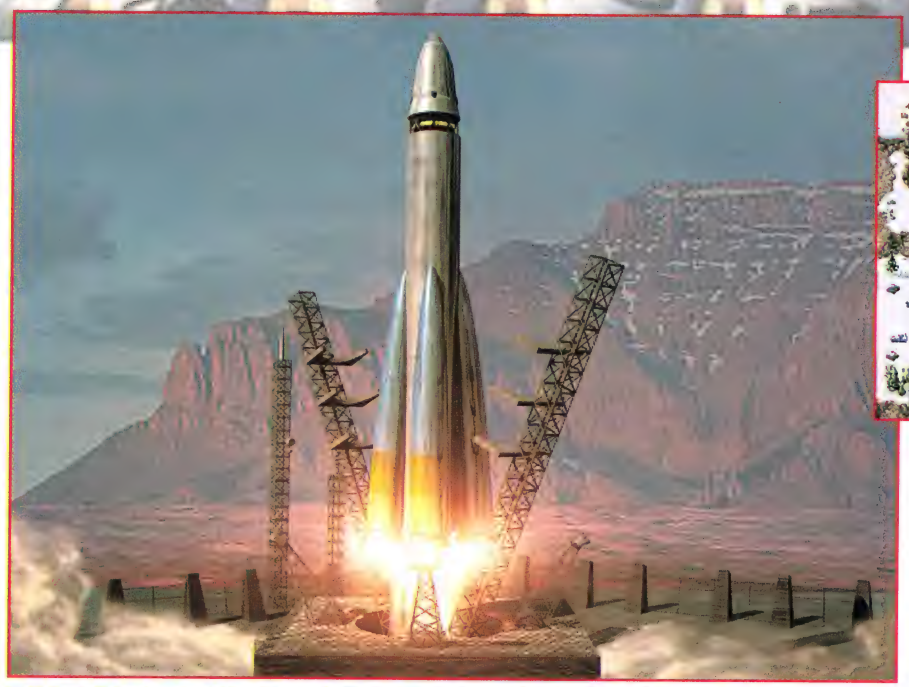
The traditions of the wargame are retained through the turns, but simultaneous resolution of those turns is an original way to combine the engrossing action of real-time combat with the depth of turn-based strategy.

Reactive Crowds

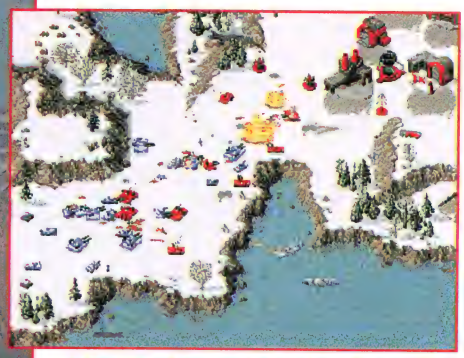
"And it's headed right towards the crowd..."

"Ooohh"

"That's gonna leave a mark"



■ If it ain't broke, don't fix it: Red Alert will continue C&C's tradition of engaging cut scenes.



■ Snow and Super VGA will be welcome additions to C&C.

deficiencies with an enhanced AI that will incorporate three difficulty settings. The blocky landscapes and characters are also being overhauled into full Super VGA glory, which, apart from simply looking better, will allow you to see twice the area that was displayed in the original. (Of course, everything will be twice as small.)

New unit types such as dogs, spies, mines, saboteurs, paratroopers, and submarines will give the fighting greater depth. The sea will add a third prong to the attack possibilities, and improved control over the land and airborne units—including the option to use waypoints en route to objectives—will help generate swifter, more organized assaults.

In the context of C&C, Red Alert is a prequel in a timeline to be developed over the coming years. One C&C game a year, beginning with Tiberium Sun in '98, will develop the story of this plausible universe. In Red Alert, set in the late 20th century and depicting an alternate World War II, a Soviet Empire begins a march to liberate Europe. The backdrop of peace in the preceding years made this assault something of a surprise, and the routed allies are caught in disarray. Stalin's troops seem on the brink of victory—but they haven't reckoned with you!

Over 40 missions present an engrossing challenge in single-player mode, but multiplayer games with up to six players over an IPX LAN will surely have C&C veterans drooling. A terrain editor is a useful addition to the package, guaranteed to get the battles blazing over phone lines throughout the world.

X-COM: APOCALYPSE

MicroProse

Available early next year

The first two games set in the X-COM universe—UFO Defense and Terror from the Deep—were purely turn-based strategy games. Between them, they amassed a very large following of dedicated gamers enthralled by the depth of strategy and tactics needed to succeed in the ever-changing missions. So why is the hotly anticipated third installment appearing in a round-up of real-time strategy games? Because MicroProse has incorporated fans' advice to speed up the gameplay and added the option of playing Apocalypse in real time.

The X-COM organizations' continuing battle against alien forces takes a new turn when an interdimensional gateway in the self-contained city of Megalopolis provides a portal for aliens to enter the city. Showing scant regard for sci-fi originality, the aliens take over the minds and bodies of influential citizens and begin an insidious campaign of terror.

Strange incidents begin to occur, and X-COM begins its investigation. A picture of this invasion slowly emerges, and the inevitable conflict arises. Further alien attacks become more bold, with large scale armaments causing massive devastation. Fortunately, X-COM has some kick-ass weaponry of its own with which to retaliate.

A final showdown with the aliens takes place on their own world—so long as the right technology has been researched—and an epic battle

■ Welcome to Megalopolis.

PLAY *the Demo on the disc*

■ **Don't get too used to this environment—it won't be the same next time you play.**

ensures the portal is destroyed and the city is safe. For X-COM veterans, these events can follow the familiar turn-based patterns, but a new breed of strategy fans is likely to be attracted by the fast pace of real-time combat.

Be it jumping on the popular bandwagon or enhancing the gameplay, the addition of the real-time action elements could indeed open up the X-COM universe to action gamers as well. For the first time in the series, multiplayer gaming will be supported. And because the city of Megalopolis is randomly generated, each game will involve different routes and different strategies to reach the ultimate goal. The result should be some serious replay value.

WAR WIND

Strategic Simulations Inc.
Available October '96

At the very least, you've got to give SSI credit for being upfront about who it's copying with War Wind. At first glance, the title looks remarkably similar to Blizzard's Warcraft II. However, take the time to dig a little deeper, and you'll find some intriguing differences.

War Wind is set on the planet of Yavaun, where four distinct races—the plantlike Eaggra, serpentlike Tha'Roon, powerful Obblinox, and mystical Shama'Li—are locked in mortal combat for world domination. Each race has its own strengths and weaknesses and must battle its way through its own series of single-player campaigns—each with its own storyline. There will be 28 single-player scenarios in all, along with 24 multiplayer scenarios (for up to 8 players) and a scenario editor.

In an interesting twist on the genre, War Wind's heroes will play a pivotal role in each race's struggle. Whatever race you choose, you can recruit one of Yavaun's legendary heroes to help your cause. These champions help train your units in special fighting skills to try and gain an edge over your enemies. In addition to recruiting your heroes, you'll have to fight to protect your own clan leader (lose him, and it's game over), build vehicles for land and water transportation, lay mines to trap enemies, and fight Yavaun's various native beasts as you go on quests for treasure. Also, unlike C&C and Warcraft, War Wind will allow you to transfer units from scenario to scenario—so it won't feel like you're always starting over. ■

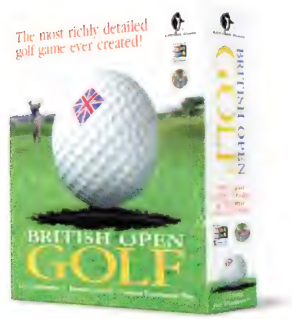
■ **War Wind will feature four distinct races with different abilities and attributes.**

■ **Combat will be fast and furious.**

Hitting stores this fall

Fore!

...look out for the most exciting tournament golf game you've ever played.



"This is NOT your typical golf game!"

(You will take a 2 stroke penalty for hitting the spectators)

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Blast your way to www.interplay.com and join the ranks of over 500,000 pilots who have downloaded the interactive preview.

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YOU DON'T REBUILD.

YOU RELOAD.

"The lighting and motion effects are first rate...you can jump into this game immediately."
-Computer Gaming World

"This game is hot! It takes the best and combines them into one neat package."
-Computer Games Strategy Plus

- 50 adrenaline-pounding missions plus 15 multi-player missions
- Battle over 20 aggressive 3D alien predators animated in real time
- Lock and load with over 25 armaments including: guided missiles, fuel-air mortars and plasma cannons!
- Up to 16 player anarchy deathmatches, team missions, plus head-to-head modem warfare

Available on PC CD-ROM.
Coming soon for Macintosh.

PLAY the Demo on the disc

Dugout Gems

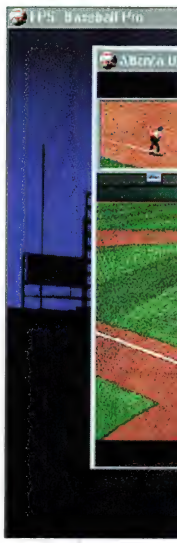
By Peter Olafson

Baseball Pro vs. Strat-O-Matic vs. Triple Play vs. Big Hurt

Here are the diamonds that really sparkle. We've called up the four freshest faces from this summer's computer-baseball bench and assessed their respective shots at the big time. With the National and American Leagues' best meeting in the World Series, we've ranked them in the same competitive spirit. As in the autumn classic, the level of play is smart and snappy. Everywhere you look, you'll find a star.

Hoist the Flag

The brightest among them—and our World Series champion—is Front Page Sports: Baseball Pro '96.



You may well be thinking, "Yeah, right," and I can't blame you. I expressed some disappointment with this Sierra release in a review in October: Windows 95 groan, groan, groan. Cluttered screen gripe, gripe, gripe.

But that's in part a measure of my own high expectations, born of long experience with this most ambitious of baseball games. In context with other hardball games, I'm a Baseball Pro lover, not a fighter. Never has one so sought to be all things to all people and succeeded in so many areas.

The most striking quality for me is still the simplest: At the plate and on the mound, this feels like baseball—not a simulation of baseball, not an action game with baseball as its theme, but just baseball. I can't quantify it more neatly than that, except to say that the undocumented organ under the sternum, which rises into my throat and drops into my stomach in moments of crisis, is always active when Baseball Pro is in play.

Fred McGriff heads home after socking a huge home run.

Naturally, there's more to it than game physics. I could speak to the game's graphical beauties, its engaging sound, its huge statistical capacities, the rigors of its artificial intelligence (active computer managers), its broad scope (players who age and retire). But without that essential underpinning of variability—what baseball is all about, really—these things wouldn't mean as much.

This isn't to say that Baseball Pro doesn't have some bad habits. When the batter connects and the game twitches from the 2D pitcher-batter mode to full-screen 3D, the window leaves the impression of jerking up and to the left, and that's where my head kept turning—regardless of where the ball was bound. I want a proper manual: I hate Sierra's new manuals-on-CD policy. And I still wish they'd dispensed with all the messy little windows.

Yet, I've learned to live with those features. Baseball Pro is worth it. Out of the current crop, the game is unsurpassed.

As far as I can tell, the key to this distinction lies in Baseball Pro's approach to the game. Most baseball games use predetermined results: As soon as the ball leaves the bat, it's destined to be a 417-foot home run, or a liner to third, or a bloop single that falls between two outfielders. In Baseball Pro, the ball—thrown or hit—is a blue bolt of potential that's vulnerable to circumstance and environment.

Bottom line: Nothing happens the same way twice.

Cleveland's second baseman leaps in an attempt to grab a liner. (He missed.)

Jack McDowell prepares to deliver one up to an Atlanta batter in Front Page Sports: Baseball Pro. (Last time we saw Jack he was looking for a shower cap.)

But how does it fare against the king of spring, Tony LaRussa Baseball 3? Actually, head to head, it's a very close race—just as it has been since 1994. Stormfront has tweaked TL3 with a range of minor features, and third-party developer Nick Keren's Ultimate Utilities fills in a lot of holes. TL3 has a great, crisp look, and I enjoy the GM Challenge (playing the game from a front-office point of view).

Still, Tony 3's "feel" is robotic compared to Baseball Pro, and, in sum, I'd give the Sierra game a slight edge. (Sierra On-Line; 800-757-7707; www.sierra.com; Win CD; $54.95)

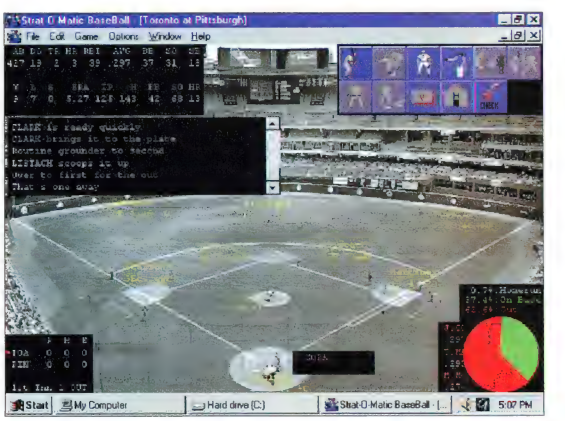
Better Luck Next Year

Baseball Pro does have a rival at the stats end: Strat-O-Matic Baseball 6.2 and the recent Strat-O-Matic CD-ROM Baseball 1.0, the pennant winner in our lineup.

Your response this time may well be "Huh?" You won't see this one on store shelves. Strat-O-Matic, a software version of the venerable cards-and-dice game, is sold only through the mail.

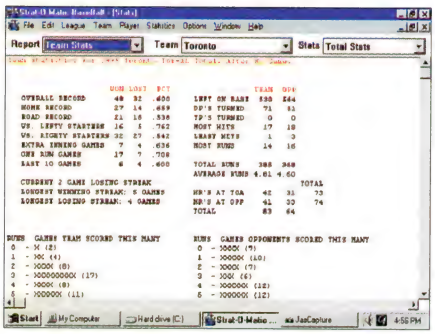
But you'd do well to track it down. I've used Strat to run a league for about four seasons running and have consistently found its combination of ease of use, reliability, and statistical realism virtually unmatched. (It's also the only one of the bunch that's been brought to the Macintosh, which has a meager supply of baseball games.)

It's the detail with which you can run a team that makes Strat something out of the ordinary. Naturally, you can set up multiple lineups and a starting rotation, but you can also designate preferred substitutes and relievers and fine-tune the way the computer manager runs things—even how individual players are used. (For instance, if you have a fast squad, you'll probably want the team to be "aggressive" on the bases. Then again, if you have a couple "pudges" on the team, version 6.2 and the CD-ROM edition allow you to set them to steal less often.) Reports of all sorts are at your fingertips—among them, delightfully newspaper-like reports that display the day's games, the probable pitchers (with their current records), and running tallies for MVP and Cy Young awards.



Otis Nixon grounds out to open a game of Strat-O-Matic CD-ROM Baseball.

The CD-ROM version for Windows and Mac adds the pleasures of dragging and dropping (earlier takes were a bit more mechanical), lovingly detailed play-by-play description (text only), and, most particularly, a feature called the Regulator. This takes your hitters toe-to-toe with the pitcher in a graphical, full-screen matchup



Strat's stats will tell you everything you want to know about your team. Here's a breakdown of one squad's performance.

that allows you to influence the play through more detailed player control without upsetting the game's precious statistical balance.

Strat-O-Matic 1.0 does have a few rough edges. FPS's treatment of injuries is far more realistic. (In Strat, no player can be injured for more than 15 games.) And the computer general managers don't do much with their teams. While they can respond to human managers' trade offers via the Swap-O-Matic—sometimes with a broad sense of humor—they can't make offers themselves (as Baseball Pro's managers do). That makes for a sense of no one at the wheel. Also, the graphics are sort of like Microleague's baseball games of a couple of years back and aren't up to the competition. (The CD-ROM edition comes with black-and-white stadiums; an add-on disk allows you to see them in color.) And the copy protection remains a sore point.

But this is a small outfit, without the vast resources of a Sierra, and it's not quite fair to judge its games by the same standard. Even so, they've improved steadily with every update. If you're serious about your computer baseball, Strat-O-Matic will reward your diligence every step of the way. (Strat-O-Matic; 800-645-3455; www.enter.net/~adamw/strat.html; Win/Mac CD; $66)

One or Two Players Away

Our division champ is Electronic Arts' Triple Play '97: Virtual Stadium Baseball. The whys and wherefores take a little explaining.

In *Bull Durham*, Kevin Costner's Crash Davis told his teammates that major-league ballparks are like cathedrals. He was right on the mark. Baseball stadiums have their own heightened reality. The grass is never greener than when arrayed in the three-quarter circle of an outfield, earth never earthier than when it has a white line running through it, players never more like their baseball-card selves than when basking in the reflected glory of artificial light.

Admittedly, this is an impressionistic view of the Great American Pastime—"Oh, Crash, you do make speeches"—but it's one that I've never seen translated into a computer baseball game until now.

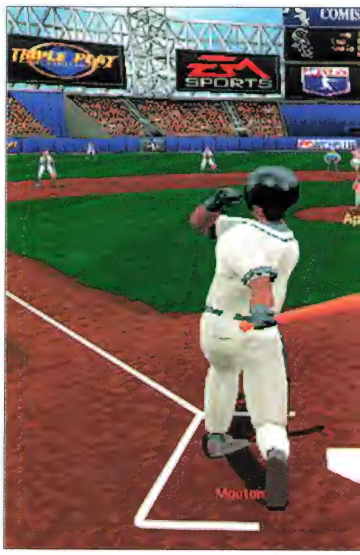
Triple Play is a conversion of the console game and has the bright, hard hyper-reality of baseball down to a science. It took me out to the ballpark, parked me in the choicest of seats, and provided a vivid experience that, while slightly less than full-fleshed, was also slightly more than real. For that alone, it deserves special recognition.

Triple Play '97 brings you the majesty of America's ballparks.

There's an almost physical dimension to Triple Play. It doesn't so much run as sprint. It doesn't play music; the music bursts out. It doesn't display pictures; it pictures the on-field display. It grabs you and it holds you, and you stay.

Of course, there's more to it. You've got all the major-league teams and stadiums, and they look great. You can play by modem. (Baseball's wait states are the perfect answer to latency.) You can have multiplayer games on a single machine.

It's not quite a full-featured baseball game—console games tend naturally toward action—but it's still more of a stat hound than some. Among other things, it allows you to trade players and track top stats. You can even build a player. (It's funny—all of mine are 6' 4" and weigh 290.)



The baserunner inlays are a nice touch.

My complaints are of the gum-under-the-seat variety. I never quite took to the batters' appearance; I was left with an impression of underlying polygons jutting out here and there. I didn't like the fireworks overlay that accompanies a home run. And I found it difficult to hit for power, even in the home-run derby (a thrilling long-ball competition that challenges you to smack the horsehide as hard and far as possible).

But my biggest problem was installation. Under Windows 95, it took three installs of DirectX 2 and the game itself before one finally took and returned to a non-corrupted desktop screen and an acknowledgment that the game was in its proper place.

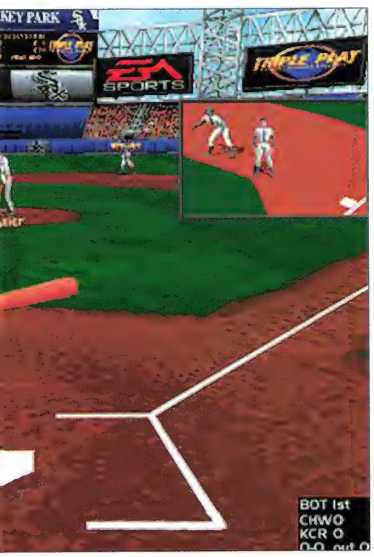
Once it did take, the problem was solved. Triple Play is still on my hard drive, and booting it is still surprisingly like walking into a ballpark.

As good as this game may be, it's not quite up to Accolade's Hardball 5, released earlier in the year. No action-oriented slugger so perfectly nailed the pitcher-batter confrontation, and this incarnation wraps it in a luxurious blanket of stats, sumptuous graphics (love the insets of runners on base!), and features (a great replay/highlight mode) while sacrificing nothing of the action. On deck: Hardball 6, due next year. (Electronic Arts; 800-245-4525; www.easports.com; Win 95 CD/DOS CD; $59.95)

A Little Short in the Bullpen

Finally, the wildcard slot goes to Acclaim's Frank Thomas Big Hurt Baseball.

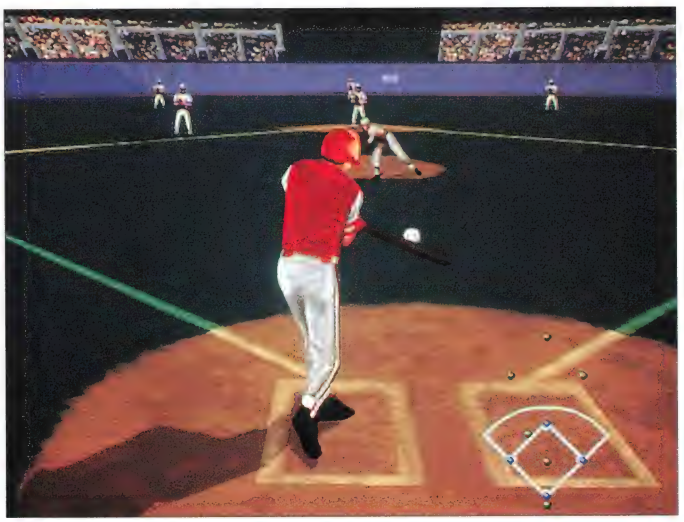
This action-based game wouldn't be among the very best unless we made room to accommodate it. That said, it isn't bad. In fact, it's one of the best things Acclaim has released since it started publishing computer games.



Like Triple Play, Big Hurt appeared first on the consoles, and it has the brusque, in-your-face presentational style of a console baseball game: big music, big graphics, big animation. It doesn't eat stats for breakfast. It doesn't have Triple Play's bright edge. In fact, the in-game graphics are slightly dull.

But Big Hurt is just full of surprises. I was initially uncomfortable with the keyboard controls, but once you pick up the system, you'll wonder how you managed it any other way. Batter outlines display the jagged "step" effect even in high res, but the animation is fluid and realistic, and the TV-like front end is gorgeous.

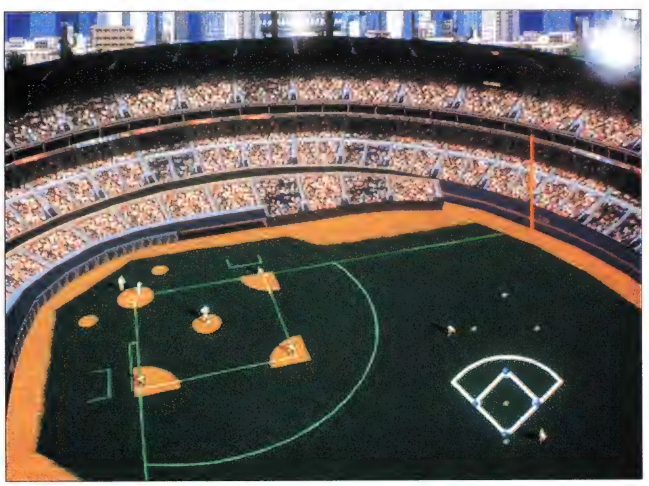
The announcer's patter, while repetitive—how many times do you need to hear about the new zip code the home-run ball is going to need?—does manage to keep pace with the game's action and is generally on-target in its descriptions.



Batter animations are smooth and realistic.

But what appealed to me most and what I still remember is a range of endearing details. I like that the umpires don't stand there with mud on their faces as play unfolds, but signal that, for instance, a ball has gone foul. I like the way the pitcher slaps the ball into his glove, mops his brow and checks each of the base runners. I like that the way fielders pick up, throw, and catch the ball hasn't been standardized (they can jump and dive for the ball). And if you can spot the distant in-game scoreboard during the game—the camera zooms in on it at the end of each half-inning—you'll see that it's keeping meticulous track of the action. It's details like this that finally bring a baseball game all the way home.

Big Hurt is big on detail.



Big Hurt Baseball has beautiful stadiums but is lacking in the stats department.

Unfortunately, Big Hurt gets trapped in a rundown between second and third. Again and again, I watched hit balls roll past outfielders, only to miraculously reappear in their throwing hands. The game is prone to the classic console-game oddity of having an outfielder throw the ball to first (rather than second) on a bases-empty single to right field, center, and even left. Opposing batters sometimes seem to swing when the ball's barely halfway to the plate. The curveball swoops in on an absurd trajectory, to the accompaniment of a jet-engine sound. While the background sounds are generally well done, some (like fans whistling) are played at a relatively high volume, which gives them a disembodied quality, and the peanut vendor sounds as though he's talking through the PA system.

Finally, the stats element is wanting. To be fair, the one it has is nice: In its season mode, Big Hurt tracks standings but handles accumulated season stats only for the team you're running. It doesn't even display league leaders, so you don't have any sense of context for your performance.

So this time, Frank doesn't quite make it around to score. But what it does, it does well enough to be entertaining. It's a rough diamond, but it sparkles still. (Acclaim Entertainment; 516-759-7800; www.acclaimnation.com; DOS CD; $49.99) ■

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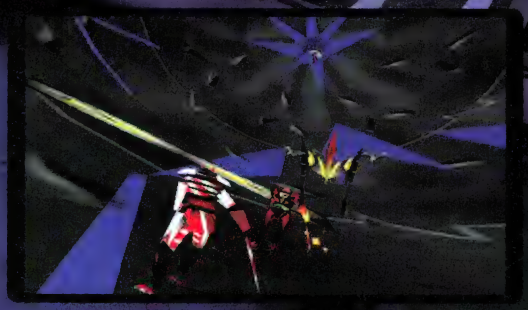
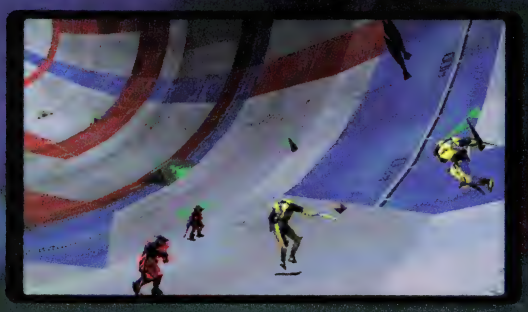


ENGAGE IN 4-PLAYER NETWORK ACTION THAT FEATURES THE SPEED OF HOCKEY AND THE SAVAGERY OF COMBAT. BE THE MVP OR BE DOA.



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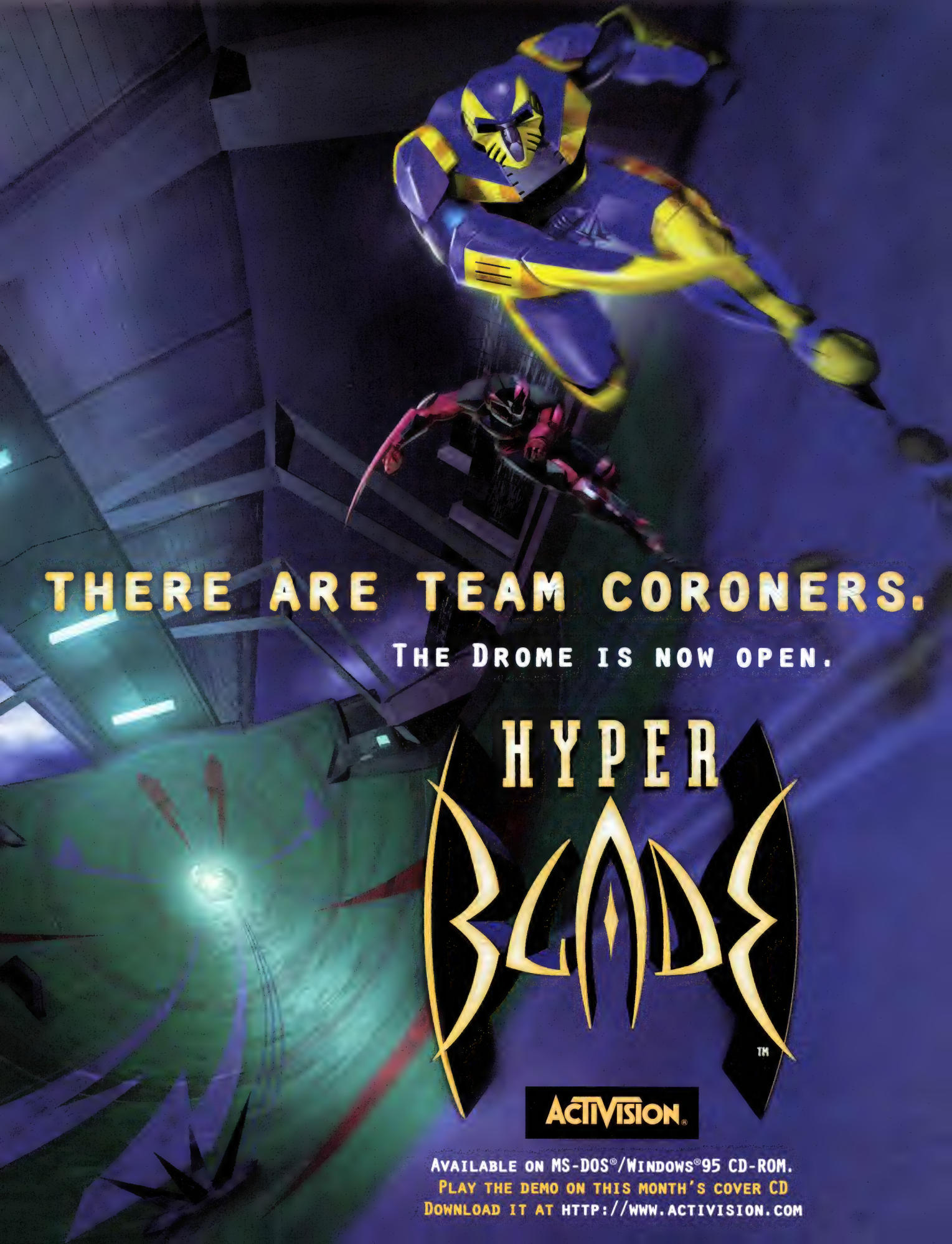
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Empowered

It wasn't easy, but here's how I transformed my PC from an ancient computer to an awesome game machine.

By Willem Knibbe

Everyone was talking about it. I'd seen it at my friend's house. I'd played it at the office. I had to have it.

Like accountants drooling over VisiCalc on the Apple II, like engineers salivating over the first version of AutoCAD, I was turning into one of Pavlov's dogs over Quake. It was my killer app.

A few confessions: I am a game geek through and through. It started with Pong and continued with the Atari 2600 and ColecoVision on to the Nintendo SNES and Sega Genesis—and finally to the PC. Three years ago, I bought what was then a state-of-the-art Acer system: 486DX2, 8MB RAM, VESA local bus graphics with 2MB VRAM, 9600bps modem, and a double-speed CD-ROM drive. Man, I was on the cutting edge.

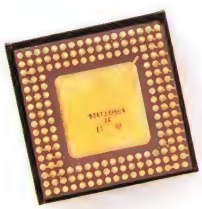
But—here comes confession No. 2—I am not the most computer-savvy person in the world. I didn't really care what made my big, expensive game machine tick; I just wanted to play. And I resented that I was supposed to upgrade some component every week just to keep up with technology. So, I essentially watched from the sidelines as my machine went from state-of-the art to average to downright ancient. Sure, I did some easy upgrades like slapping in some more RAM and putting in a 14.4Kbps modem. For the most part, my machine was adequate for the games I played—Duke, C&C, and Bad Mojo ran just fine. And if my system couldn't cut it, I simply used one of the PCs in our game lab.

But then there was Quake.

Word to the Mother (board)

OK, I thought, the game requirements say that it needs a Pentium, but maybe by some fluke my PC can handle it. Ha! Sure, it ran—at about four frames per second in the smallest window. Oh, what a painful tease. What to do, what to do? My id (ahem) argued convincingly, but my superego just wouldn't let me spend $3,000 on a new system. I resigned myself to joining the upgrade rat race. I would single-handedly transform my lowly 486 into a Pentium gaming superpower.

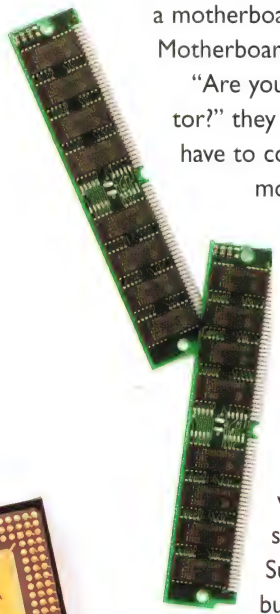
No big deal, right? I'd just need to go get one of those Pentium OverDrive chips that let you upgrade your computer's processor. But just as I'm on my way to the computer store, I stop by our network guru's desk and mention my mission. Rob starts asking me all kinds of questions about my system specs and bus type—and I'm surprised I know all the answers. Well, turns out my VESA local bus motherboard is too slow to show significant performance gains even by stepping up to a Pentium. What I really need to play Quake, he says, is a new motherboard.



Oh, my, I'm getting in deep. I could picture myself swapping CPUs, but ripping out the heart of my computer and starting over with a new motherboard seems like a scary proposition. He assures me it's an easy upgrade, almost as easy as RAM. In addition to gaining a Pentium, I'd also reap the benefits of true Plug and Play, Enhanced IDE interfaces, and PCI slots.

OK, fine—a new motherboard it is.

I go to CompUSA. No motherboard upgrade kits there. I go to Fry's. Not a single motherboard upgrade kit in sight. I call Intel, Cyrix, and Acer—no one wants to sell me a motherboard. Chips, yes. Motherboards, no.



"Are you a reseller or distributor?" they ask. "No? Well, you'll have to contact one to get a motherboard. We don't sell them to the public."

It finally dawned on me—even though it should be a simple thing to do in this Plug-and-Play era, computer companies don't want you to upgrade such a core component. Sure, they want you to buy better sound cards, whizzy 3D accelerators, faster modems, and more RAM. But they don't want you to buy a motherboard; you're supposed to purchase a brand-spanking-new computer every two years. It's the Wintel way.

"The big companies don't make enough money on motherboards. They'd much rather sell you the whole system," affirmed a marketing director at a small computer company.

Well, now there was no way I could give up. Time to do some sleuthing: I went on the Net and searched for motherboards, checked out what the resellers were offering, then visited the distributor/reseller areas of big computer companies. After researching for a few hours,

Motherboard Upgrade Tips

- **Make sure you get the same size motherboard as the one you're replacing. Most motherboards are "Baby AT" size and work in the majority of PCs, but if you want to play it really safe, ask your reseller for a motherboard manufactured by the same company that made your PC. This helps ensure that the slots in the back of the case line up with the slots on the motherboard.**
- **If you're going to be using existing components, like a sound card and graphics card, get a new motherboard with enough of the same type of slots as your old one. For instance, if your modem and sound card use ISA slots, make sure your new motherboard has at least two ISA slots.**
- **Check to see if your new motherboard is fully Plug-and-Play compliant. It's much easier to tweak things in Windows 95 than in the DOS-based setup programs.**
- **Does your Pentium motherboard have a 256KB cache? If it's not onboard, you'll need to add it.**
- **Intel Triton chipset motherboards are crucial for running Intel Pentium chips. Should you go for an AMD or Cyrix 586 processor, the motherboard need not necessarily bear Intel's chip set.**
- **If your motherboard comes with a 256K pipeline burst cache, you're not likely to benefit too greatly from the extra cost of EDO RAM. But memory performance is faster on non-cached motherboards.**
- **For those highly detailed video modes in Quake, a quality graphics card is vital. Video card performance–particularly that of 4MB cards–can enhance game play as much as an extra bunch of RAM.**
- **Uhhhh, don't try this at home. (Just kidding.)**

talking with people more technically savvy than myself, and doing a little price comparison among resellers, it was time: I called my friendly reseller and read off my spec list, trying to sound as technically astute as possible. "I want a motherboard with a P133 that's Plug-and-Play compliant and has the Intel Triton chipset, four ISA slots and three PCI slots, two IDE slots (for a hard drive and CD-ROM), four SIMM slots for RAM, and a 256K pipeline burst cache."

See, that sounded good. I picked a 133 because it was kind of middling—150s were a lot more expensive, while I feared 100s would be too slow by next week. I wanted Triton because that was the latest chipset from Intel and was, a friend told me, a little faster than the previous chipset. The pipeline burst cache is a must with Pentium chips. It's where the processor looks before checking RAM for instructions. When the instructions are in the cache, the PC can move ahead quicker than if it has to go to RAM.

"Sure, we can set you up," the rep said.

So, on a hazy Friday evening, I went to the same friendly reseller, plunked down my money, and asked if they had any installation tips. "It's very easy—it's all Plug and Play," he said. Uh, thanks for the tip.

Date Night

Feeling like I was on the brink of technonerddom—I mean, it's Friday night and my big plans are installing a motherboard?—I went home with visions of Quake dancing in my head.

I had second thoughts as I popped open the case of my trusty PC. This sacred box of chips, boards, and circuits enabled me to kill aliens, conquer Africa, throw touchdowns, rescue hostages, and generally make the world safe for game geeks like me. And now I was going to desecrate it, rip out its faithful guts. There would be no going back. Perhaps I'm making a big mistake, I thought. If it ain't broke, don't fix it.

Quake, my id whispered, *Quake*.

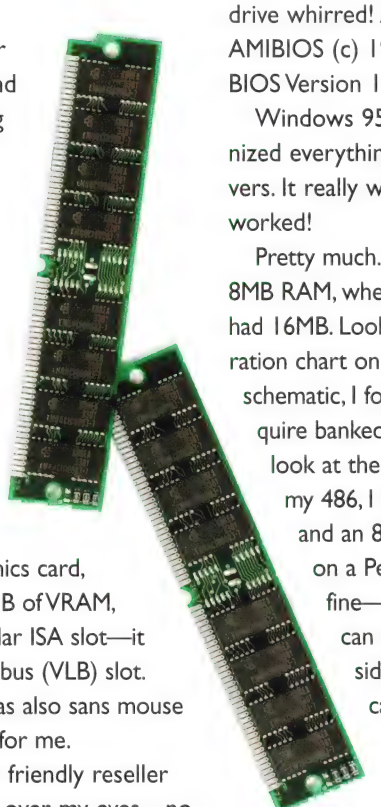
I bid a fond farewell to the system that had been my companion for three wonderful years, took a deep breath, and wished myself luck. Carefully I began removing the sound card, RAM, modem, and graphics card from the existing motherboard. Then out came the mother of all boards and in went the Quakeboard. It fit right into place. Looked comfortable, even.

Now, there wasn't really an installation manual for this. It was pretty obvious that the cooling fan clipped on top of the Pentium chip, and I looked at the diagram of the board and figured out what plugged in where. Power, check. Hard drive, check. Floppy drive, check. Sound card, check. Modem, check. Printer port, check. RAM, check.

OK, we're looking good. I'd only been messing with this for a couple of hours and I just needed to plug in the keyboard, graphics card, and mouse and turn it on to start playing Quake.

Yeah, right.

Of course, my old keyboard isn't a PS/2 keyboard, so I couldn't plug it into the new motherboard. And my fine S3 graphics card, with its indulgent 2MB of VRAM, wouldn't fit in a regular ISA slot—it needed a VESA local bus (VLB) slot. The motherboard was also sans mouse port, so strike three for me.



Sigh. I thought my friendly reseller had pulled the wool over my eyes—no mouse port? Well, I guess it wasn't on my list of specs. I closed up the computer as my 486 motherboard mocked me from the trash heap in the corner. There would be no Quake that night.

Thanks for the Memory

I took the whole mess—half-installed motherboard, old motherboard, RAM, essentially anything in my apartment that was computer-related—to my friendly reseller first thing Saturday morning. He looked over what I'd done, and I was proud that I'd plugged the stuff in where it needed to go. He patiently explained that I needed a PCI graphics card (duh!), serial mouse (plug it into COM 1), and a PS/2 keyboard. I got out the checkbook and brought home the goods.

Back at home, I popped in the new graphics card and plugged in the keyboard and mouse. It took all of 15 minutes, and now the moment of truth had arrived. I turned on the power switch. The screen flickered! The hard drive whirred! And there it was: AMIBIOS (c) 1992 AM Megatrends, Inc. BIOS Version 1.00.04.CBO.

Windows 95 immediately recognized everything. It installed the drivers. It really was Plug and Play! It worked!

Pretty much. It claimed I had only 8MB RAM, when I damn well knew I had 16MB. Looking at the SIMM configuration chart on the motherboard schematic, I found out Pentiums require banked SIMMs—meaning they look at the four SIMMs in pairs. On my 486, I had a pair of 4MB SIMMs and an 8MB SIMM. Can't do that on a Pentium system. Oh, OK, fine—RAM is now so cheap I can afford another 8MB; besides, having 24MB of RAM can't hurt. Well, I couldn't do anything about that right then, so I decided to see how Quake would handle with a paltry 8MB on a Pentium.

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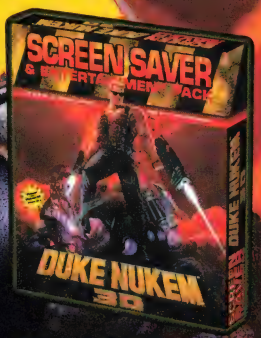

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It took a long time—about three minutes—to boot up. It seemed to bog down in the Sound Blaster configuration part, and the CD light would stay on for about two of those three minutes. Aha! Of course! I had my CD plugged into the sound card. I wasn't using the motherboard's IDE adapter, which was supposedly a faster connection.

My id started whispering things to me again: If you have to reconfigure the CD anyway, and you have to go get more RAM, shouldn't you just get an 8X drive too? Cut scenes won't take an hour to load and then play choppily, said my devilish id. The Beast Within will flow smoothly, installing software will take seconds, and Reznor's Quake soundtrack will sound so much better at 8X...

Well, that last bit's not logical, but my id knew mention of the magic word Quake would do the trick. Off I went to bring home the latest parcel of goodies.

Spinning Out of Control

Installing the RAM was a snap. I simply put in the new SIMM with the other 8MB one, and voilà! a 24MB system.

Installing my new TEAC 58E 8X CD-ROM drive was also a snap, thanks to Win 95. I went into the Device Manager and removed my crummy ole 2X drive, turned off the computer, yanked out the old drive, plugged my fancy new drive into the second IDE port, and ran the audio cable from the drive to my Sound Blaster.

When I turned the computer back on, the drive worked like a charm. Even the drive carriage seemed eight times as fast—hit Eject and you better stand back; that door flies open. All's well; all's well—until I quit to DOS to install Quake.

"Invalid drive specification."

Huh?

C:\D:

"Invalid drive specification."

OK, I'm steamed. It sure wasn't invalid when I was in Windows. I look at the manual again. The part about Windows 95 installation is a paragraph long and says Windows 95 will recognize everything, don't worry about it. Nowhere, not even in the troubleshooting section, does it mention my little snafu.

I'd gone through a similar thing with my modem back when I first installed it: Windows 95 installed the drivers it needed, but DOS was left wanting. So I had installed the modem via DOS, then copied the lines it added to the AUTOEXEC.BAT file to the DOSSTART.BAT file. I figured I could do the same thing here. But Big Brother knows I'm running Win 95 and won't let me.

I call tech support. After waiting in phone jail for five minutes, then being on hold for three more, a very pleasant tech support rep informs me that it says what to do in the README.TXT. Silly, silly me. Of course I should have checked the README file.

Only it doesn't say much of anything in the README file. It essentially restates the "Don't worry, be happy" stuff about Windows 95.

So I call tech support—again. I get through in about four minutes this time (I remembered which buttons to push to get out of phone jail). A different tech-support person walks me through the process of getting DOS to recognize my drive—after I convince him that I really do need to be able to access the drive when I'm in MS-DOS mode.

First I had to copy this from A: to C:
TEAC_CDI.SYS

Then add this to the CONFIG.SYS file:
Device=C:\TEAC_CDI.SYS /D:TEAC-CDI

Then add this to the DOSSTART.BAT file:
C:\WINDOWS\COMMAND\MSCDEX.EXE /D:TEAC-CDI /M:15

Pretty intuitive, eh? I asked him why it wasn't in the manual or README file. "It's on our fax-back service. And it will be on our Web page. And besides, I need a job, don't I?"

I hung up.

Back in MS-DOS mode, D: existed, and Quake easily installed.

Gulp, here we go: C:\QUAKE\quake

My id finally relaxed as Reznor's soundtrack boomed through the apartment. I was hypnotized, mesmerized, and played until the sun came up. Ahhh, mission accomplished.

Final tally: $408 for the motherboard and processor, with an extra $10 for the cooling fan; $56 for the 8MB of RAM; $35 for the Trident video card; $18 for the keyboard and mouse; $199 for the TEAC CD-ROM. Grand total: $726 and probably 10 hours of sleuthing and phoning and installing and tweaking.

I tell you, it was worth it. I feel empowered. Every time I turn on my PC, I feel like I'm thumbing my nose at Wintel. I know that's silly—they've got me now, my computer is like a fabulous new puzzle game that I can't put down, and I'll upgrade every chance I get—but I didn't just break down and buy a new system. I'm also no longer intimidated by the guts of my computer—hey, I put them there.

Now if you'll excuse me, there's a Vore that needs a good talking-to.

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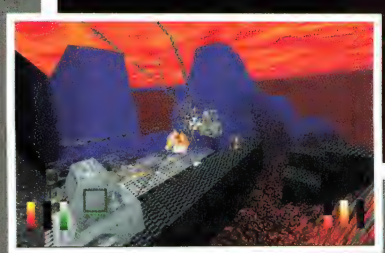

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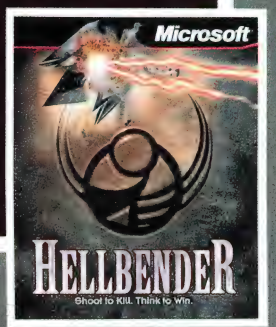

KIDS TO ADULTS
K-A
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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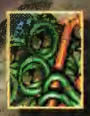

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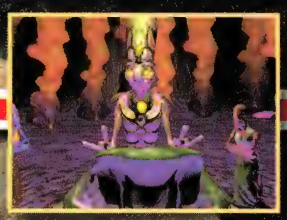


ACTUAL GAME SCREENS MAY VARY

LEISURE SUIT LARRY: LOVE FOR SAIL!

PLAY the Demo on the disc

By Daniel Morris

The ultimate swinger is back, and he's brought a typewriter and scratch-'n'-sniff cards with him. Get ready for a new level of bawdiness.

What a long, strange trip it's been. Through six games now, Leisure Suit Larry has thrilled, chilled, occasionally spilled, and basically menaced society as the last relic of the Swinging Age. Along the way, he's amassed a legion of devoted fans who eagerly await his next set of misadventures.

Well, it's almost upon us, and Larry's next outing will bring a load of features that promise to make it worth the wait.

Leisure Suit Larry: Love for Sail finds Larry Laffer as a guest aboard the PMS *Bouncy*, a pleasure liner known to its regulars as "The Lust Boat" and fully stocked with casino, pool, and shuffleboard lanes.

Larry enters a parade of guest competitions, none of which he's terribly good at. But from horseshoes to gambling, history's winningest loser will just have to find a way to push it home in the end. And, of course, there are dozens of gorgeous, impressionable women hanging around all over the place.

Al Lowe, the gentle giant behind the Leisure Suit Larry phenomenon, spelled out the first of Love for Sail's new features, literally. Among the game's more useful CyberOptions is CyberType 2000, a type-command interface that responds to one-word commands and speech, including many of your four-letter favorites.

"We took the part of type interfaces that we liked—the openness, the ability to move and interact—and took out what we hated," says Lowe.

Citing a disdain for the "type-till-you-bleed" repetitiveness of many type-interface games, Lowe restricted the Larry interface to one-word entries. Time-honored commands like "open" and "take" will go hand in hand with other, more colorful options, but nowhere will you find the need to "go north, look west" to navigate; maneuvering around the ship is all mouse-driven.

Not only that, a map screen will allow you to zap right over to any location on the boat without the need to painstakingly traverse places you've already explored.

Lowe says he asked himself a few essential questions: "What's fun about these games? The interaction, the characters. What's not fun? Going back over places you've seen already. So the 'teleport' option will eliminate the snooze factor."

Many games claim to bring a whole new dimension to the gaming experience, but Love for Sail delivers on this promise with CyberSmell 2000. Enclosed with the game is a CD-sized card with nine scratch-'n'-sniff squares of various colors. At many points in the game, a corresponding colored square will flash in the corner of the screen, a la John Waters' epic Smell-o-Vision movie *Polyester*. Among the scents are salt air, coconut oil, perfume, limburger cheese, diesel fuel, fish, and flatulence—each with its own bearing on Larry's adventures.

You don't have to play this one from the sidelines—Love for Sail puts you in the game. By scanning your photo into the game, you can assume the onscreen role of Last Week's Winner of the cruise contest. You can even record your own .WAV file (from scripted lines included in the game) to participate firsthand in a few punchlines.

Besides exercising your voice, you'll have to exercise your mind if you plan on solving the contests. Larry Laffer forced to use his noodle? (OK, so it may not be a total first.)

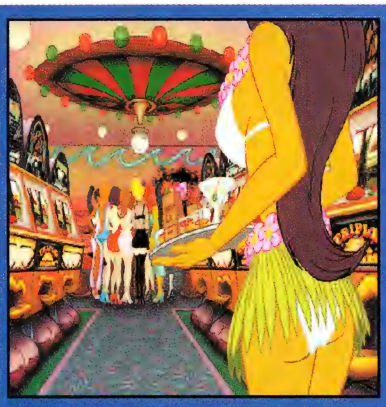
"You actually have to put two and two together to progress," says Lowe. "I think people will find the puzzles harder than ever before."

But let's be honest here. Does Leisure Suit Larry exist to be the pinnacle of puzzlers? The main brain drain? No way. Larry's here to have R-rated fun at the expense of good taste. In that department, Love for Sail promises its biggest delivery ever.

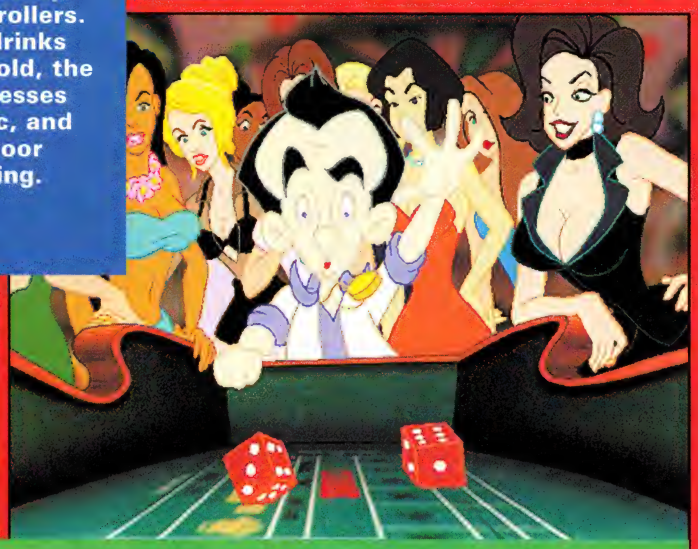
"We just said, 'What the hell, let's see what we can get away with,'" Lowe says. "It's definitely bawdier than any of the past ones have been."

So come aboard—we're expecting you on our titanic Guided Tour. But we're not sure what else to expect. (Sierra On-Line; 800-757-7707; www.sierra.com; Win 95/DOS CD; $49.95; scheduled to ship in October)

WILL IT BE LUCKY SEVEN? LARRY'S COUNTING ON IT!

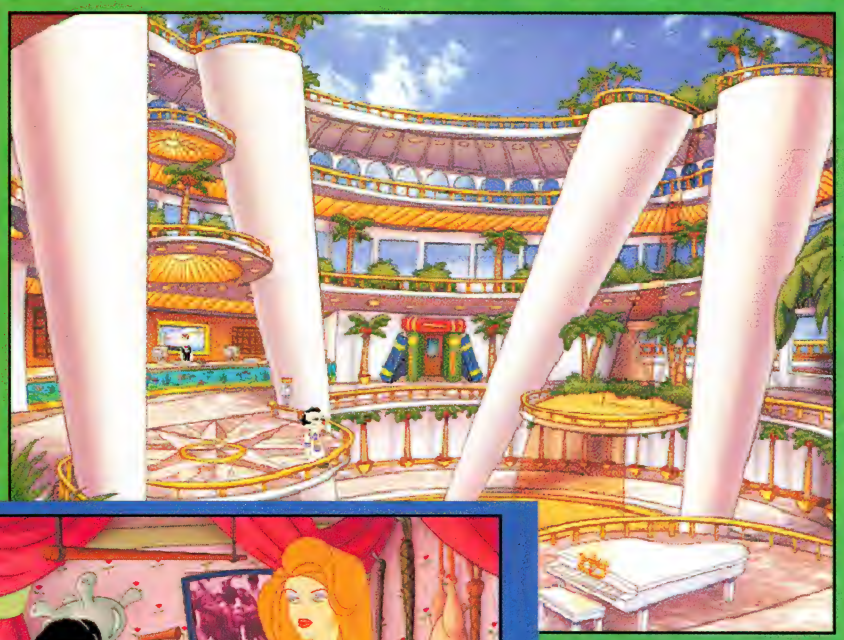


The casino, happy haven of hard-up high rollers. The drinks are cold, the waitresses exotic, and the floor jumping.

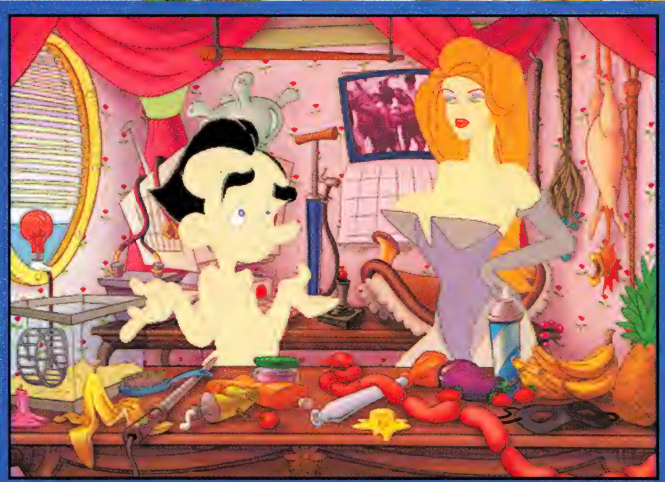


Lady Luck, shine on a gambling man tonight. For a guy like Larry, craps is a spectator sport; not watching the dice, mind you, but watching the spectators!

Welcome aboard the PMS *Bouncy*, aka the Lust Boat. Yes, that is a Macintosh doubling as an anchor.

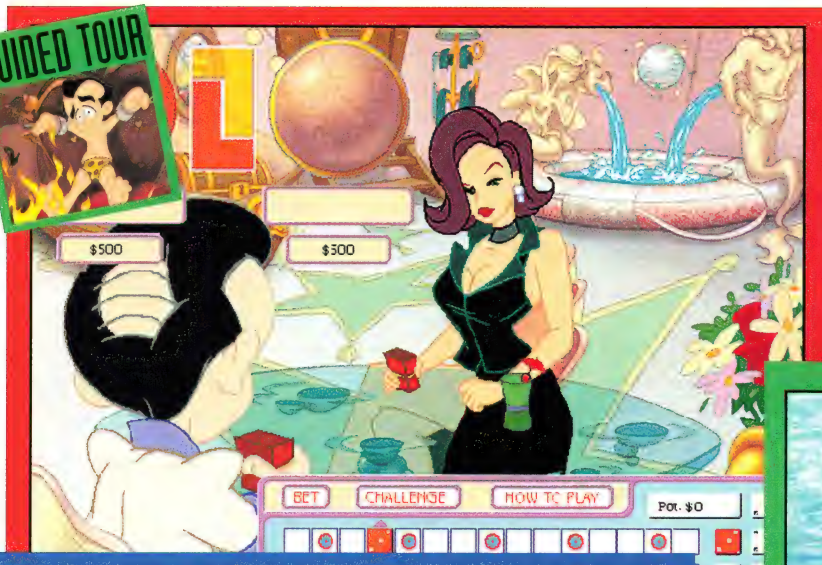


It's time to play it again, Sam. With five decks of the ship to explore, Larry's cruise will keep him plenty occupied.

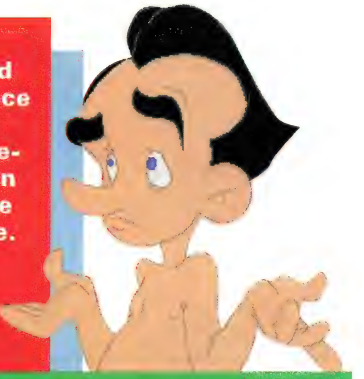


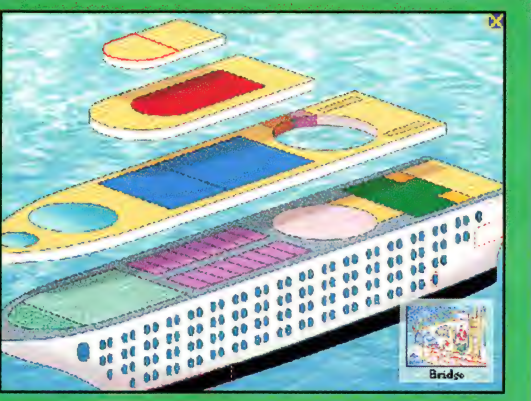
If more bookkeepers were like ship librarian Victorian Principles, Larry would have spent more time studying.

The kitchen will make you anything you want, as long as it's fish. This is a perfect time to break out your Cyber-Smell card.



You'll need a poker face for Liar's Dice—especially when clothes are on the line.





Tired of endless backtracking? A handy map lets you point, click, and teleport your way around the *Bouncy*.

Hell's bells! We've heard of hot and bothered, but this is ridiculous. Only Larry's quick wits can save him now. (Good thing he's got us to help him out.)

I think we're going to need a bigger boat...or maybe not. As usual, Larry is out on a limb.

Would it be interactive if you couldn't tell Larry what to do? It's back to your favorite command interface of yore with CyberType 2000, allowing you to direct action and speak to characters with simple one-word entries.

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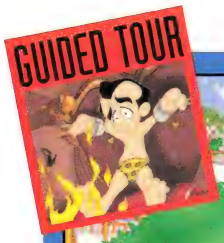
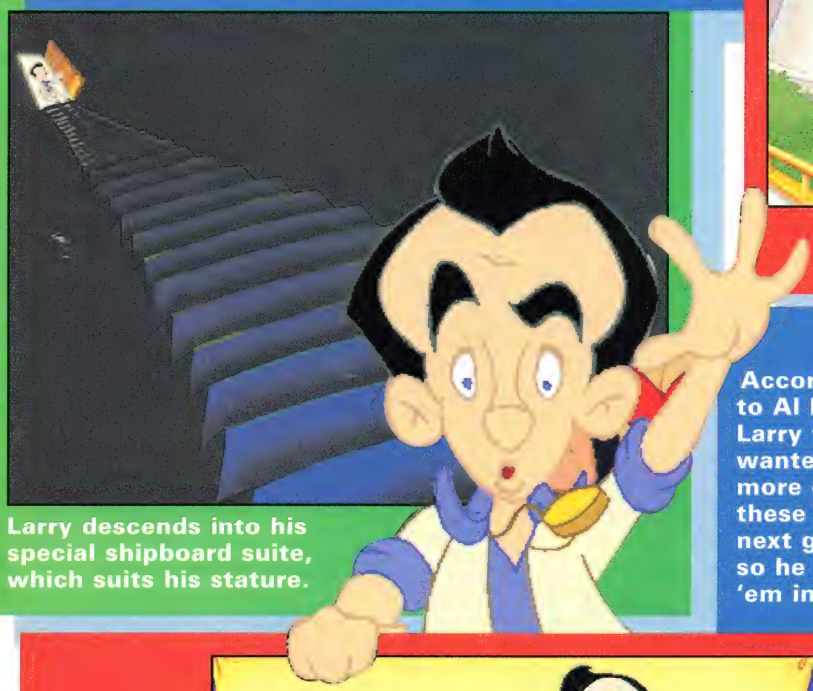


MORE MAD ADVENTURES OF THE PC'S ORIGINAL MACK DADDY!

Enter the horseshoes contest and use any means at your disposal to win. *Any* means. Be afraid.

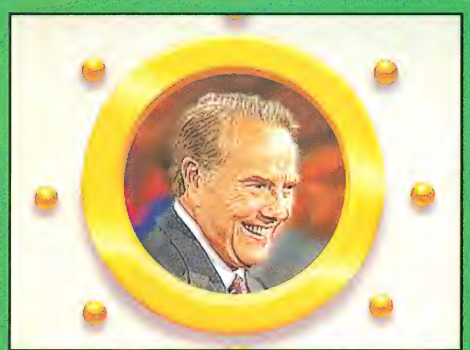
This promises to be Larry's Really Big Adventure.



Larry descends into his special shipboard suite, which suits his stature.

According to Al Lowe, Larry fans wanted more of these in the next game, so he put 'em in.

Sometimes an eclair is just an eclair. In this case, it's not.



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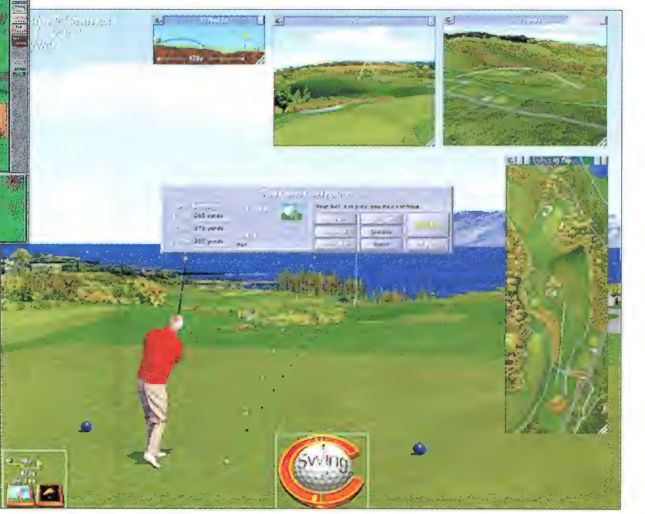
A LIST

The PC Games A List includes the top 20 titles that we've rated as either an A or A- (or the equivalent) in 1996. See the complete A List for 1996 and 1995 at **www.pcgamesmag.com.**

Close Combat



Links LS

Afterlife

Outrageous humor and stunning graphics make this SimCity clone heavenly. (LucasArts; 800-782-7927; DOS/Win 95 CD; $54.95)

AH-64D Longbow

For serious chopper-sim aficionados, Longbow's a must-buy. (Origin Systems; 800-245-4525; DOS CD; $59.95)

Bad Mojo

Love it or hate it, you've never played an adventure game as a cockroach before. (Pulse Entertainment; 310-264-5579; Win CD; $54.95)

Civilization II

A wonderfully compelling upgrade of the strategic conquest classic. (MicroProse; 800-695-4263; Win CD; $48.99)

Close Combat

A revolutionary tactical-level military sim that's reason enough to have Win 95. (Microsoft; 800-426-9400; Win 95 CD; $44.95)

Duke Nukem 3D

Still one of the top first-person action shooters—especially in multiplayer mode. (FormGen; 800-367-6436; DOS CD; $39.99)

Fantasy General

The newest entry in the General series offers solid wargaming from start to finish. (SSI; 800-601-7529; DOS CD; $50)

Links LS

As close to a real game of golf as you can get—provided you've got a speedy Pentium. (Access Software; 800-800-4880; DOS/Win 95 CD; $79.95)

MissionForce: Cyberstorm

Turn-based strategy games don't get much better than this. (Sierra On-Line; 800-757-7707; Win CD; $59.95)

Monty Python & the Quest for the Holy Grail

Outrageous adventure that's perfect for Python fans. (7th Level; 800-979-8466; Win/Win 95 CD; $49.95)

Mortal Kombat 3

The best home version of the classic arcade fighting game. (GT Interactive; 800-610-4847; DOS CD; $55)

The Pandora Directive

Tex Murphy returns in this engaging sequel to Under A Killing Moon. (Access Software; 800-800-4880; DOS/Win 95 CD; $49.95)

Quake

Right now, it's the best, bloodiest 3D action game. (id Software: 800-434-2637; DOS CD; $45)

Screamer

This PC racer gives console driving games a run for their money. (Virgin; 800-874-4607; DOS CD; $54.95)

Silent Hunter

An addictive submarine simulation that blends technical seamanship with visceral thrills. (SSI; 800-601-7529; DOS CD; $55)

Terra Nova: Strike Force Centauri

Awesome sound effects and a compelling story help make Terra Nova the most immersive combat experience around. (Virgin; 800-874-4607; DOS CD; $59.95)

Warcraft II: Tides of Darkness and Beyond the Dark Portal

A classic strategy game, made even better with 24 new scenarios in the add-on disc. (Blizzard Entertainment; 800-953-7669; DOS CD; Tides of Darkness, $50; Beyond the Dark Portal, $30)

Wing Commander IV: The Price of Freedom

Everything you could ask for in a Fly & Drive game—and then some. (Origin Systems; 800-245-4525; DOS CD; $55)

Z

Real-time wargaming with excellent AI and lots of humor. (Virgin; 800-874-4607; DOS CD; $54.99–$59.99)

Zork: Nemesis

The latest Zork once again redefines adventure gaming. (Activision; 800-477-3650; DOS/Win 95 CD; $49.95)

How We Rate Games

PC Games uses a letter-grade system to rate games. Everyone who's gone to school knows what our grades mean without resorting to an in-depth explanation or clever chart: an A+ is the best score possible and an F is a complete bust. To give you a better feel for the overall quality of a title, we rate each game in five key areas.

Gameplay: How good are the game's interface and control scheme, and how much fun is it to play?

Getting Started: How much reading, studying, and hardware-tweaking are required before you can start to have fun? (The less the better.)

Graphics: How advanced and attractive are the game's visual elements, and how well do they match the game?

Sound Check: How good are the game's sound effects and musical score, and how well do they fit the game?

Overall Grade: Taking everything into account, how strongly do we recommend the game for purchase?

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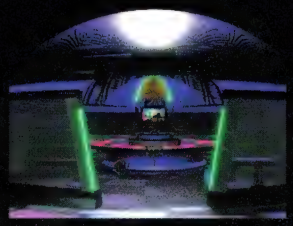

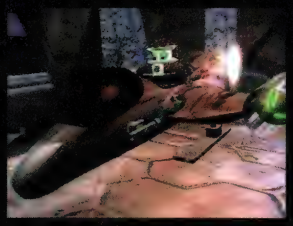

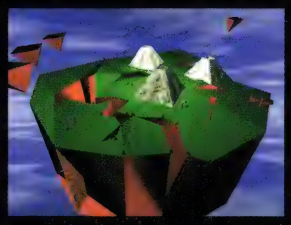

five FAQ's about the most unique maze/adventure game ever!

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you! immersed in the first-person perspective, you play a renegade hacker trying to destroy an insidious virus launched by Rood O'Dor, an evil genius out to trash the world's computers.

what?
vertigo! negotiate real-time 3-D interactive mazes featuring multi-threat traps, dizzying pratfalls, and puzzling enemies by mastering a progressive set of gravity-defying skills.

where?
cyberspace! surf to 18 virus-mutated maze-like worlds, free-floating through a bizarre interpretation of the Internet.

when?
october! at your local software retailer.

why?
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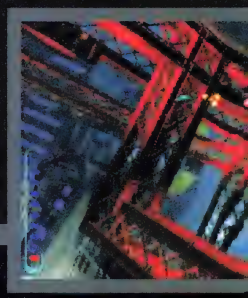

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Indy, meet your match

Tomb Raider

By Daniel Morris

Lara Croft doesn't look like your everyday tourist, but then, she's hardly an everyday gal. Lara is a tomb raider, one of a rare breed of adventurers who brave the ferocious mysteries of ancient crypts in search of time-sealed treasure. A cross between Indiana Jones and Aeon Flux, she makes looting an art form.

In her case, the grail is a mystical scion, shattered into pieces and dispersed in deep tombs in far-flung corners of the ancient world. To recover the shards, she must venture into the ruins and retrieve them from a nest of beasties and bad guys.

Lara gets set to delve into the ancient Incan crypt.

Tomb Raider is the flagship release of Eidos Interactive, the publisher formed by the merger of Domark Software and U.S. Gold. Hyped for months, the title appears so far to pull off one of the visual stunts of the year, incorporating a Resident Evil–style feel with a freewheeling camera and a gracefully animated, incredibly manueverable heroine.

The game also offers a few interesting twists on the standard 3D first-person explore/kill games of the moment. The view is second-person, with a clever camera that moves and spins in fine cinematic form. Lara is in your sight the whole time, and the agile, fluid camera has a wonderful time keeping up with her remarkable range of movement.

Motion-captured with more than 2,000 frames of animation, Lara is a sight to behold as she runs, jumps, swims, tumbles, rolls, leaps, flips—she's a sour-faced gymnast packing heat. Her repertoire of moves is put to creative use in the early levels we looked at; different tricks will successfully navigate her through obstacles such as trenches (requiring precise jump-roll combinations to escape), pools (where you must balance exploration with the need to break the surface every minute or so to get air), and more.

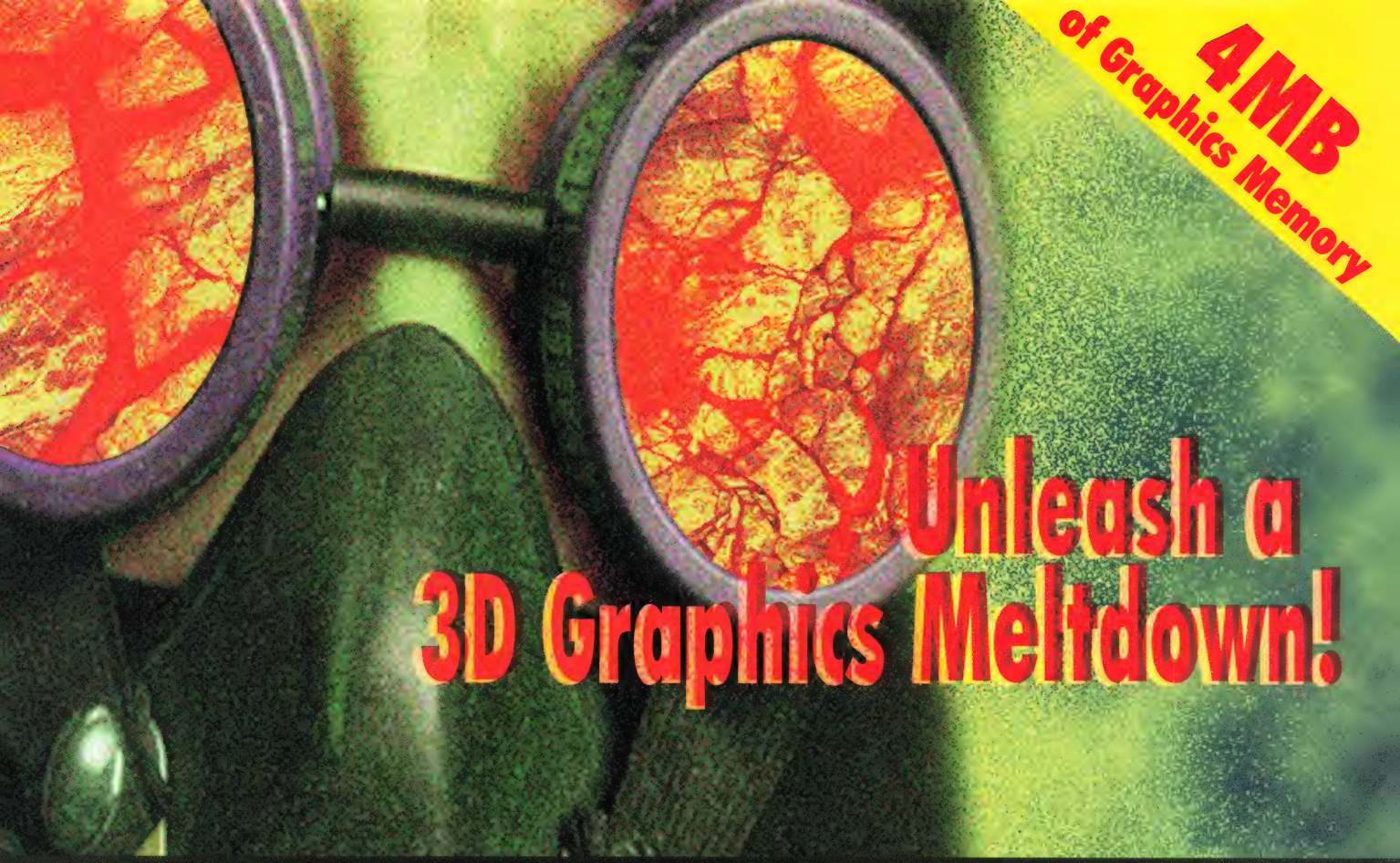
Of course, you won't get far without some classic guns 'n' ammo. Starting off with a pistol, Lara can pick up shotguns, Uzis, and even grenades. She's constantly on the lookout for medpacks and, needless to say, the shards of the scion.

But don't get Tomb Raider confused with Quake or any other all-action shooter. The

Doesn't she ever get cold in these tombs?

Gator attack!

Publisher: Eidos Interactive
415-616-2022
www.domark.com
Platform: DOS/Win 95 CD
Available: November 1996



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AFTER

IndyCar with Reactor Graphics
Now you're racing! See the detail on next car. Watch those rearview mirrors – that's real 3D! Notice the crowd in the stands and the mountains in the background. And how about that sky!

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INTERGRAPH

Head underwater to scout for passageways, but be sure there aren't any alligators.

Sweet talk won't get you far with Ms. Croft.

violence quotient is secondary to the Indiana Jones quotient. This game looks and feels like a high-tech, 3D update of Pitfall! more than it does Duke Nukem 3D. Your principal challenge is to negotiate the puzzling labyrinths of the tombs; that happens to entail some bloodshed.

This could actually prove a bit tiresome to the kill-crazy crowd, who will be chanting for more splatter and less spelunking, but they'll still find plenty to shoot at.

No lions, no tigers, but bears—oh my!

Death ain't pretty in here.

Violent femme: Lara pulls out the gats.

Guarding the crypts are a chilling assortment of beasts and obstacles. Packs of wolves, rats, swarms of bats, bear lairs, alligator-infested ponds—you've guessed by now that Lara Croft is no friend of PETA. But for those who'd rather see humans at the business end of her firearms, the tombs also serve as bases for hostile revolutionaries. And what would Lara's day be without an occasional encounter with another (competing) tomb raider deep in the dark heart of the catacombs?

Lara's quest takes her through the remnants of four ancient worlds: the remains of an Incan temple, an Egyptian pyramid, a Classical Roman ruin, and the fabled lost city of Atlantis. Each tomb is vast and convoluted, and just exploring the whole thing could take quite a while. The levels we plunged into had plenty of places to get stuck in, where some heads-up thinking is the only way out. Those expecting to blast their way through the mazes had better prepare to spend a lot of time at the bottom of chasms firing frustratedly into a wall. What do they say about the journey being its own reward?

Tomb Raider's wonderful graphics certainly make the journey a reward for the eyes. Alligators visibly cruise just beneath the surface of a pool. Surprised by a wolf-pack's ambush, Lara goes stock-still and points her guns from a flawless firing stance. Every nice touch brings you deeper into Lara's adventure until, like her, you're tensing before turning every corner.

Lara herself is a treat to commandeer, and not just because she's a hardbody. Her impressive range of motion might have been wasted in a less interactive environment, but with Tomb Raider, she's allowed a wonderful playground in which to work out. Vaulting over slumped walls, brushing through hanging ivy, swimming through dark waters…she's down there, and she's not coming back without her trophy.

Now *this* is tourism.

SIMCITY 2000 NETWORK EDITION

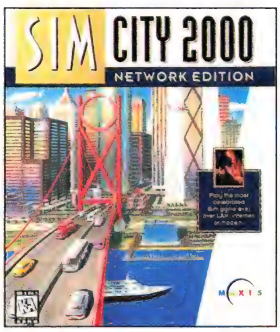
The world's most popular simulation finally gets some competition.

Player 1 is the server that brings the players together—before trying to bring them to their knees in a mad scramble for power.

Player 2 surveys the city looking for suggestions he can make to the group on how best to beautify their burgeoning burg.

Player 3 is in the midst of heated negotiations with Player 1 that could bring some much-needed revenue to her district.

Player 4 checks out the new stadium and power plant he shrewdly got approved at the city's last real-time town meeting.



After years as the only city simulator in town, SimCity 2000 now has some worthy competitors. Namely, you and three friends, competing for resources and revenue over the Internet or a LAN. Or two of you can go head-to-head over a modem. It's the SimCity 2000 Network Edition—now ready to compete for your free time.

When you're building a mega-metropolis, two heads (or three or four) are better than one. So import saved SimCity 2000 cities or start a new urban sprawl. Chat live with your connected commissioners. Wheel and deal for property and vote in town meetings.

Or forget back-scratching and try back-stabbing—in a shameless grab for political power. **The Network Edition. Not just multi-layered. It's multi-played.**

MAXIS

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Look out—here comes the Red Baron!

PREVIEW!

Flying Corps

By Steve Klett

Dealing with enemy Zeppelins is a daily chore.

The Great War was a horrible time in human history. Whether it was lung-burning mustard gas or the fetid stench of mud-soaked trenches, the trials endured by the ground troops were unbelievably ghastly, which is perhaps why so few games choose to model this period.

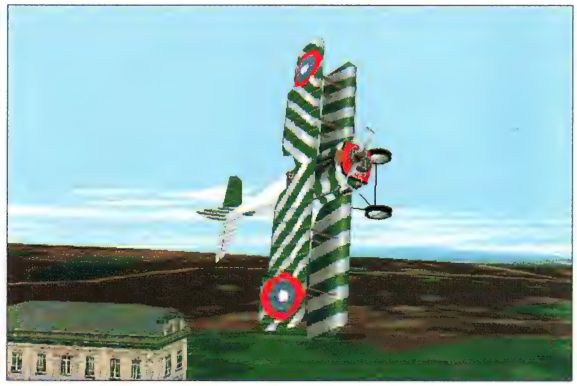
What happened in the air was another story altogether. Sure, WWI pilots had the shortest life expectancies of anyone in the war. Sure, the crates they flew were more like kites than instruments of destruction. Nevertheless, they enjoyed a certain sense of bravado—of honor and romanticism unmatched in human conflict.

This Camel is about to be made a footnote in history.

Rowan Software and Empire Interactive attempt to capture the essence of the WWI flying experience in Flying Corps, which should hit store shelves this month. Having produced such titles as Strike Force Harrier and Dawn Patrol, Rowan is no stranger to the world of flight sims, but Flying Corps is by far its most ambitious title yet.

The company has made every attempt to establish Flying Corps as the most realistic flying experience yet and draw players into the history of the period. The game will feature six different player-controllable aircraft: the American Spad 13 and Nieuport 28, the British Se5a and Sopwith Camel, and the Central Powers Albatross DIII and Fokker Dr1. Sixteen additional computer-controlled planes also appear in the game, including the Bristol F2A, Fokker DVII, and Sopwith Pup.

Each aircraft is painstakingly modeled after its real-world counterpart to handle as realistically as possible on your PC. For example, in our prerelease version of the game, the Sopwith Camel had a tendency to turn to the right, which must be compensated for with the rudder. The actual Sopwith Camel is notorious for this trait. Each of the six controllable aircraft will reflect the behavior of the real thing. If you're not a heavy realism buff, don't worry—Rowan has thought of you, too. Each airplane will have a more forgiving novice flight model where you can turn various realism features on and off at will.



Bored? Why not buzz the Red Baron's Chateau?

Rowan's authenticity carries through to the game's landscape, which was generated using actual aerial reconnaissance photos and maps from the period. You'll be able to make out buildings and hills from the air, and fly under bridges or follow roads to the nearest town. That's crucial because, like real-life WWI pilots, you'll be navigating mostly by landmarks.

Well, no one said being a WWI ace was going to be easy. But at least you can be assured that the landscape, objects such as tanks and buildings, and, most importantly, aircraft are rendered in stunning texture-mapped, Super VGA detail.

Flying Corps will feature four campaigns based on actual WWI events. For example, in The Battle Of Cambrai, you're a German flight commander charged with delaying the advance of a massive British tank and air assault on your airbase. As The Hat in the Ring's notorious Eddie Rickenbacker, you must balance your quest for fame with gaining command of and holding together America's famed Hat in the Ring Aero-Pursuit squadron.

Some of Flying Corps' other features include the ability to choose the paint scheme of your own aircraft—once you've achieved the five kills needed for Ace status, of course. There are also modem and serial link options for head-to-head play (network play is being worked on for Win 95 versions only), and in-flight help provided by CD speech that simulates a pilot's thoughts.

Whether Flying Corps will be the supreme WWI flight sim is still up in the air (sorry), but judging from what we've seen, it will at the very least give Sierra's Red Baron II a serious dogfight.

Developer:	Rowan Software
Publisher:	Empire Interactive
	800-216-9706
	www.empire/us.com
Platform:	DOS/Win 95 CD
Available:	Late November

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An exquisite use of space

PREVIEW!

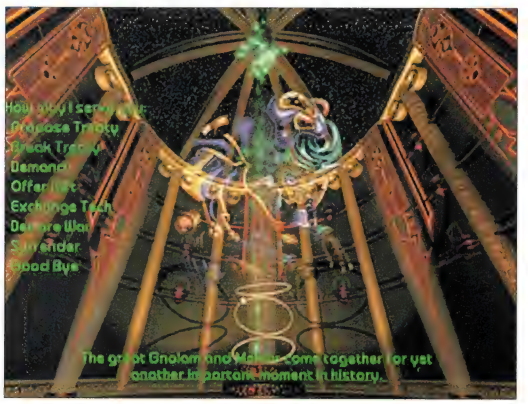
Master of Orion II: Battle at Antares

By Peter Olafson

You can explore hundreds of systems and their planets.

Individual moments in computer games rarely resonate for long in the memory. I can think of only a handful: John Romero's head on a stake at the end of Doom II; the view from the alien tower in Out of This World; and Angel Devoid, drained and yet horribly alive, draped across his machine like some vampire-on-tap.

And one more: the election at the close of Master of Orion. I awaited the verdict of the galaxy's High Council as if my own destiny hung in the balance.



Diplomacy is vital to developing a strong empire.

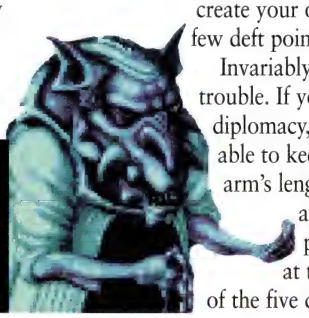
There's no comparable vote at the close of Master of Orion II: Battle at Antares—at least, not in the beta I played for this preview—but the rich game machinery that gave the tally its significance three years ago is still in place.

In fact, based on a first look at this space strategy game, it's richer than ever. MOO II smooths out a few bumps in the original, supplements MOO's mechanisms with new features, and adds texture to the established ones. Next to the occasionally rough-and-ready original, it looks like a million space bucks.

No previous experience in MOO is required. Indeed, the concept is almost as old as computer gaming itself. As in the original, you start out with a single planet and try to take over the whole shebang—and prevent up to seven rivals from doing it first—by wit of technology, diplomacy, and war. (Said shebang isn't a fixed universe; among other things, you can set the galaxy's size, age, and technology level when you start a new game.)

As in Civilization, research is everything. As long as you have the money from your planets coming in to fund it and the workers to put on lab coats, there's no end to the stuff you can devise in eight categories, from engineering to magnetism. Some of it will turn up in ship-construction menus (if you opt for hands-on combat), some of it in building menus planetside—a very Civilization II–like scene—and some simply as subtext for your burgeoning empire.

Eventually, you'll expand your way into neighboring systems and run into alien civilizations. Battle for Antares includes the 10 species from MOO plus 3 new ones: the telepathic Elerians, the trading Gnolams, and the aquatic Trilarians. (You can also create your own race with a few deft points and clicks.)



Invariably, this means trouble. If you're adept at diplomacy, you may be able to keep the aliens at arm's length with trade and research pacts. But even at the most basic of the five difficulty levels, your rivals will hold fast to their agendas, and sooner or later there'll be war. Battles can be fought in detail—the tactical mode is more sophisticated and rewarding than the one in MOO—or at a strategic level in which you simply learn the results.

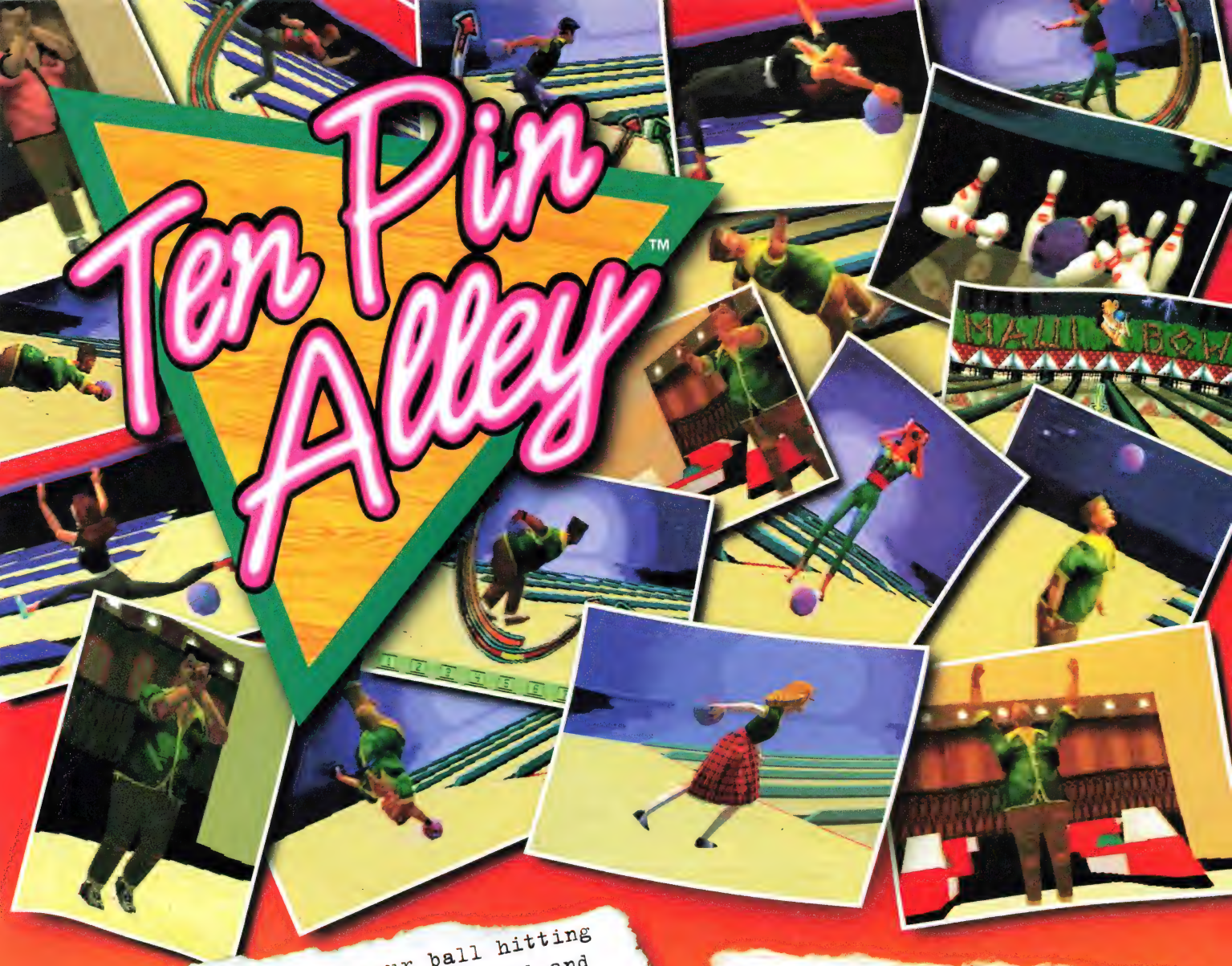
It helps to have good people in charge, and you'll occasionally find freelancers volunteering their services to run colonies and ships of the line. Well, "volunteer" is just a figure of speech; usually, they want to get paid up front. As time goes by, they'll grow in experience and level. This individual element is a very nice touch.

You can also control the appearance of random events (reported by a robotoid "GNN") and whether the Antarans will attack. I don't have the background story, but suffice it to say this is a little like throwing a berserker into the equation. The Antarans are a wood-chipper among aliens, and you'd better pray you have off-world colonies by the time they come knocking. (Then again, if you can survive the assault, the Antarans may prove a boon by knocking off bothersome neighbors.)

And Orion? It's still around, still vastly desirable...and still protected by a fearsome Guardian who eats visiting ships like potato chips. To take the game's namesake system, you'll have to beat it.

It's possible to win MOO II without Orion—and to feel good about winning without the validation of an election. The victory may not have quite the same resonance in memory, but it is all the sweeter for the dense, clean tapestry woven in its orchestration. I await the finished game with bated breath.

Publisher: MicroProse
510-552-3584
www.microprose.com
Platform: DOS/Win 95
Available: November



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It's here, and it was worth the wait

The Elder Scrolls: Daggerfall

By Barry Brenesal

Talk about serious fantasy role playing. You want it? In Daggerfall, you get it.

The setting is Tamriel, the same pseudo-European medieval backdrop used in Bethesda's earlier Elder Scrolls release, Arena. This time around, you play a young man or woman on a quest to solve the mystery of King Lysandus' continued presence in Daggerfall. Normally, this wouldn't be cause for concern, except for the fact that Lysandus is dead, he continually shouts "Revenge!" and his ghostly followers kill anything that moves outdoors after dark. To say tourist revenues are declining is putting it mildly.

You'll have to fight, as well as explore, to beat this game.

A couple of other smaller quests are intertwined with your overall mission, each with enough plot twists and unpleasant encounters to fill a major release from some less manic game producer. Figure 100-plus hours of gameplay to complete Daggerfall's main quest alone. Whew!

But your character may not live to solve the problems that beset Tamriel, because to do so requires a very powerful hero with formidable skills, enchanted armor and weapons, and lots of potions and spells. That's why Bethesda put another 100-plus hours of gameplay into all the mini-quests that take you through the length and breadth of Tamriel.

So Daggerfall is a big game—but big isn't always beautiful. Players of Arena will recall that its greatest drawback was the vanilla-like sameness of its endless mini-quests: kill the beastie, deliver the item, etc. Thankfully, Daggerfall has a lot more variety. Its mini-quests range from modest to elaborate, and many require decisions that have far-reaching consequences for your character.

For instance, you may be told to retrieve a stolen object only to discover that your employer is a would-be thief, and the current owner is an innocent victim. If you steal it anyway, a third party may offer a considerably greater sum for the object than your original employer.

Perhaps you offer the item to this new bidder, and she turns out to be on the staff of a temple that is very pleased with your choice. But the group you bypassed is a contingent of nobles from another part of the kingdom who intended to use said object in a bid for power. They're rather angry now, as you discover on the note attached to that shiv that's sticking out of your back.

Get the idea? Daggerfall isn't simply a game where you slay things in a static environment. Actions you take determine the way you're regarded by every facet of a very large, multi-layered kingdom. Be a good paladin type, or a thief who breaks into houses after dark and picks pockets by day. Each has its benefits and drawbacks; just be prepared to live with the consequences.

In addition to a greater diversity of quests—there are 200 or so, which you track through your Logbook—you also receive special quests after joining Tamriel's knightly, professional, and temple guilds. Rising in the guilds brings privileges. At higher levels, the Warriors Guild lets you create enchanted armor and weaponry. The Mages Guild lets you design your own spells. The Thieves Guild and the Dark Brotherhood—well, it's best not to speak of them.

Most quests, of course, take you deep into Tamriel's many exotic dungeon sites,

Myriad quests take you to Tamriel's furthest reaches.

GAMEPLAY:	A-
GETTING STARTED:	A-
GRAPHICS:	B-
SOUND CHECK:	B
OVERALL	A-

Publisher: Bethesda Softworks
301-926-8300
www.bethsoft.com
Platform: DOS CD (Win 95-compatible)
Requires: 486DX2/66, 8MB RAM, DOS 6.0, VGA, double-speed CD-ROM drive, mouse
List Price: $79.95

Daggerfall is an extremely deep, rich fantasy role-playing dream.

which are a must for any traveler. There, you can slash, thrust, hack, cut, cast, jump, crouch, walk, run, and sneak to your fantasy role-playing heart's content—in real time. If you get lost, there are two automap views to help you get your bearings. You'll find many traps, wondrous treasures, and more than 50 monster types roaming the corridors, countryside, and underground lakes. You can swim and fight underwater, too. And if you learn the Levitate spell or have a Levitate-enchanted item, you can even fly the friendlier skies.

The games' monsters are mostly of the typical sort—mummies, orcs, bats, etc.—but the vampires have a unique touch. In most games you kill them or they kill you; if you get bitten by a vampire in Daggerfall, then die, you actually *become* a vampire. Assuming you don't get a potion to reverse the change soon enough, you continue to play under the influence of extra abilities and weaknesses, such as enhanced strength and a loss of hitpoints if you wander out during the day.

Don't expect details on vampires or werewolves (or many other, similarly esoteric subjects) from Daggerfall's fine manual. Instead, send your character to a particularly good library in one of Tamriel's cities and read a few of the several dozen "books." While you're enjoying the sights, don't forget to exchange those heavy gold coins for a bank draft. And when you have plenty of money to your name, consider buying a house or a ship so you can store all your worldly goods in some place that's perfectly safe.

Daggerfall's considerable attention to detail is illustrated again in character configuration. You can select from 8 races and 18 predefined classes, or customize your own. There are 8 attributes (Agility, Intelligence, Luck, etc.) and 27 skills (Climbing, Blunt Weapons, Thaumaturgy, etc.) that become stronger through use. Want to give your character special advantages, like Immunity to Fire? Select from 11 broadly defined categories of benefits, but note that your character will achieve new levels far more slowly if you do so. To compensate, you may want to assign special disadvantages to your character as well, like an inability to regenerate spell points in the dark.

Daggerfall is so vast that you need more than your feet to get around.

Visually, Daggerfall is a mingled chime. The design, coloration, and texturing are quite good, particularly in the thousands of cities and smaller sites that cover Tamriel. Skies show the sun's progression (weather patterns permitting). House and shop exteriors are nicely varied, with many shapes, colors, and building materials. The dungeons are excellent, too, and some of the monsters—particularly the Fire Daedra—will leave you gasping in admiration as your character dies a fiery death.

As you gain experience, you'll learn new ways to slay those who stand in your way.

You want stats? This game has 'em in spades.

Visually, Daggerfall is a mingled chime. The design, coloration, and texturing are quite good, particularly in the thousands of cities and smaller sites that cover Tamriel. Skies show the sun's progression (weather patterns permitting). House and shop exteriors are nicely varied, with many shapes, colors, and building materials. The dungeons are excellent, too, and some of the monsters—particularly the Fire Daedra—will leave you gasping in admiration as your character dies a fiery death.

On the other hand, Daggerfall's VGA graphics look less appealing the closer you get to an object: the pixilation becomes obvious, the color palette garished, and the artwork blunted. Also, the objects, aside from animated computer characters and building structures, are all 2D. The inventory/stat screen is particularly dull.

Mark though, me lads, this graphic style has one strong advantage in this Super VGA–spoiled world of ours: it's less filling. Daggerfall's coding—all those cities, dungeons, quests, and objects—take up a mere 50K on your hard drive (minimum configuration), along with a single CD. If it had been Super VGA, multiple CDs would have been required, and screen redraws (particularly in dungeons and town streets) would have slowed down the game considerably.

Daggerfall is the closest thing yet to a fantasy role-player's dream. The large, complex, beautiful world of Tamriel leaves you free to plot your own course and reacts accordingly. If you want depth, variety, replayability, and enough gameplay to make for dozens of marathon play sessions, look no further.

• Don't even think about attacking town guards until you have strongly enchanted armor and weapons. They'll beat you every time, and the fines are nasty. • Always check the postings at the gates of major towns for news about wars and shifting alliances. • The final quest for each guild will provide you with a unique, powerful artifact. • Beware of putting too much faith in the words of the wealthy and powerful. • Your six designated primary and major skills will rise much faster than minor and miscellaneous skills. Choose those six wisely for the kind of character you want to create. • All monsters are basically hostile, but some may be willing to talk and even exchange information if you know enough of their language.

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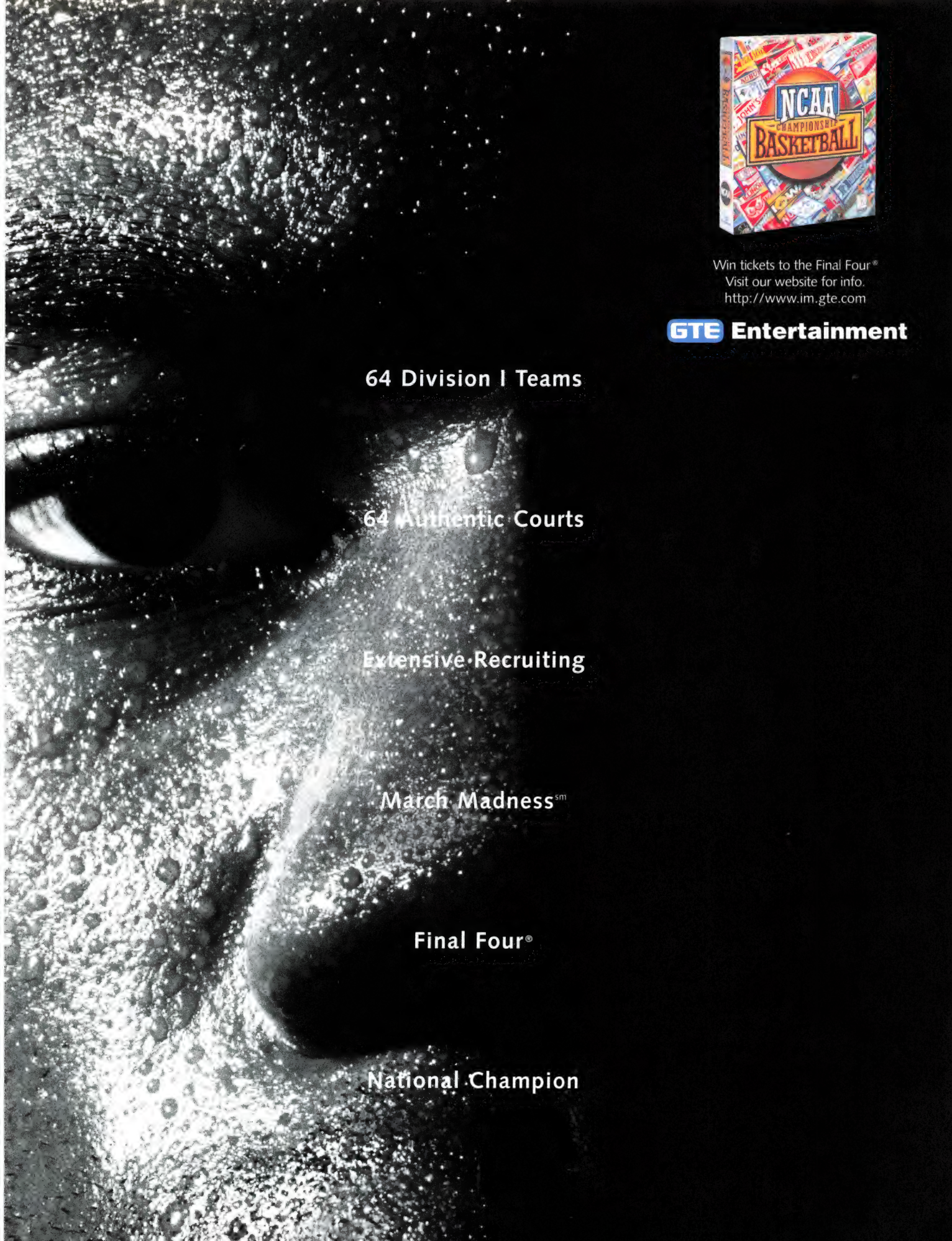
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He's baaaack!

Crusader: No Regret

By Steve Klett

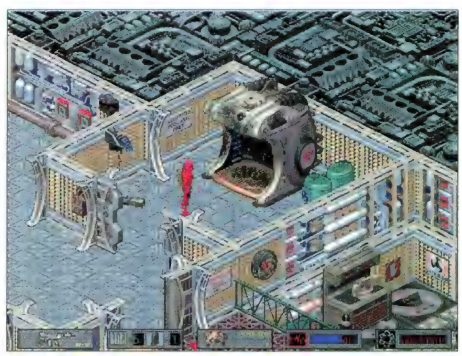
Silencers are known for providing "a light" at a moment's notice.

OK, I admit, I like nearly all the brainless action flicks—*Marked for Death*, *Rumble in the Bronx*, *Commando*, *Cyborg*. I watch 'em all, and all their unavoidable sequels, which is probably why I enjoyed Origin's Crusader: No Remorse and its follow-up, No Regret, so much.

Not quite a sequel and much more than a simple add-on (you don't need No Remorse to play it), Crusader: No Regret takes all the mind-numbing action of the original, doubles it, and ups its story content at the same time. In fact, No Regret's story easily holds its own—or bests—those of all of the movies listed above. Its protagonist, the renegade Silencer, could go toe to toe with any of their stars and win. That's right, Arnold—you better hope the Big Red Guy doesn't decide to move to Hollywood.

If you somehow missed Crusader: No Remorse—*PC Games*' action/adventure game of 1995—you may not be familiar with the Big Red Guy you play in the game. Trust us, he's no Santa Claus. Known to his fellow freedom fighters as The Captain, he is a reformed Silencer. Silencers are members of an elite military group serving the evil World Economic Consortium (WEC), which is headed up by the diabolical Commissioner Nathaniel Draygan. As a Silencer, you are trained in a wide variety of deadly weapons and gadgetry and clad head to toe in extremely bright red armor to strike fear into the hearts of your enemies. You also bear a striking resemblance to one Boba Fett of *Star Wars* fame.

In Crusader: No Remorse, you were betrayed by Draygan and chose to join the loose Resistance—a group of passionate rebels opposed to the WEC—to exact your revenge. It took 15 levels in which you single-handedly dealt death to hundreds of WEC soldiers and destroyed an important WEC space station to gain the trust of your fellow rebels. At the end of the game, you escaped a fiery death in an escape pod, which is exactly where No Regret picks up.



Damn! You blew up another med station, didn't ya? Look before ya shoot, dummy!

A WEC freighter finds your pod drifting aimlessly in space, and, unaware of its lethal cargo, decides to see what's inside. Big mistake. When the pod is opened, you—the renegade Silencer—are unleashed. In an instant you've overpowered the guards, stolen a weapon, and are blasting your way through the freighter. From there, it's on to a mining station on the moon, one that's of strategic importance to the WEC and Draygan. Once again, it's time to annihilate everything in sight. Before you're done, you'll have it out with some new WEC baddies and Draygan himself—plus another nemesis from the first game.

As with No Remorse, you navigate No Regret's 10 massive levels via an isometric, third-person perspective. Each level is made up of several sublevels, and accordingly, you'll undertake various missions and sub-missions along the way, such as destroying a reactor or infecting a central computer with a virus. Certain levels will require you to find keycards or passcodes to get though a particular door. You'll find these casually placed in obscure corners, on a tabletop, or in the blood-soaked pockets of a WEC soldier or worker you've just slain.

Ah yes, No Regret is even more violent and gory than its forebear and you have more ways to kill things. No longer are you held to merely shooting, vaporizing, or burning your enemies. Now you can freeze, shatter, and broil 'em, too—well done or rare, it's up to you. Careful, though—as in the first game, you are often dependent on the goods your enemies carry on their bodies to keep you alive, and you can't salvage anything off a corpse you burn to ashes.

There are some new enemies to worry about as well—particularly the Servomechs that can morph in a heartbeat from a seemingly innocuous object such as a vending machine into a lumbering, armored instrument of destruction. The solution: Don't stop to buy any candy, and shoot everything—not just everything that moves.

TIPS

• While it may be fun, avoid the temptation to lay waste to everything in a room as soon as you step into it—you may destroy valuable recharging stations or crates holding powerups. • Save after each and every milestone and proceed at a leisurely pace. This game is tough! Blindly running ahead to see what's next can trigger some nasty surprises. • Kill enemy soldiers with the machine gun or shotgun whenever possible so that you can loot their pockets. • Entrenched soldiers can present tough obstacles. Remember, however, that with some weapons you just have to come close to hitting someone to kill him. • Spider bombs are a renegade Silencer's best friend.

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You'll find the enemy AI has also been upgraded slightly in this installment. Enemy troops are no longer so stupid that they'll wait for you to shoot first or merely sit and watch as a spider bomb (a walking, remote-controlled grenade) crawls over to kill them. No, they will often shoot first, destroy approaching spider bombs with insane accuracy, and roll side to side to evade your fire. As in the first game, WEC troops are extremely accurate shots. There are also a lot more traps this time around. Trust me, No Regret is much more difficult than its predecessor.

But hey, don't be worried: you've got some new moves as well. Now you can roll forward, in addition to rolling to each side. What's the big deal? Well, this allows you to somersault into a room filled with baddies and come up in a crouched position, weapon at the ready. Then you can spin a quick 360 while holding down the trigger—wiping the room clear of threats. Or, if the action's too hot, you can retreat from a crouched position, firing the whole time.

No Regret also adds support for joysticks and gamepads. This will undoubtedly be welcome for people who found Crusader's keyboard control scheme difficult to master, but I still find the keyboard to be the most efficient control device. The simple reason is that No Regret offers many more control options than your standard action game, and the typical gamepad or joystick isn't suited to handling them all in an efficient manner. Quake and Duke keyboard players will have little trouble using the keyboard for No Regret, and there's a good mouse/keyboard combo option that strikes a nice compromise. Dedicate the time to mastering whichever control method you choose, and you'll find No Regret's gameplay rewards well worth the effort.

You don't always have to shoot someone to take him out.

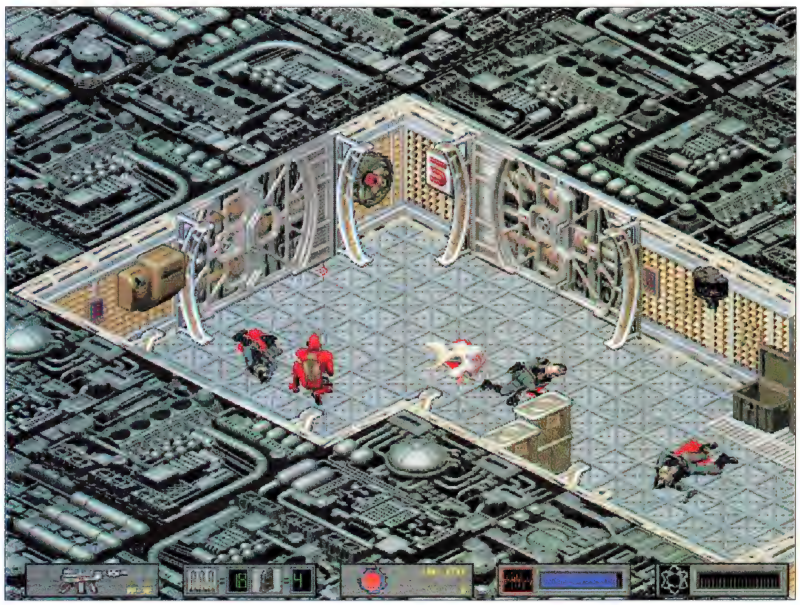
One down, two to go.

No Regret also does a better job than No Remorse of integrating its storyline with its gameplay. There are more in-game video communications with various rebel agents who will tell you about difficult areas to avoid, enemy units on the way, or where important weapons and items are stashed—all the while, of course, dishing out little tidbits that advance the game's story. The acting is still nothing to brag about, but it's not horrible either.

Visually, No Regret is much improved as well, bringing texture-mapped environs and new effects such as curved walls to the table. This may not sound like much, but these features combine to make No Remorse's graphics look simple, which is no small feat.

There's really not much bad to say about No Regret, other than the fact that it shares its older sibling's major fault: performance. All the gorgeous Super VGA backgrounds, stellar explosions, and character animations gobble up horsepower. Explosions were chunky and movement a little jerky on a Pentium 90 with 16MB of RAM. With this game, it's the more RAM the better—gameplay was absolutely fluid on the same Pentium system with 40MB of RAM, but you'd expect it to be. Also, there's still no head-to-head options—look for multiplayer features in the next Crusader installment, which is due in '97.

If you liked Crusader: No Remorse, you'll love No Regret. If you like blowing things up, you'll love No Regret. If you don't have a speedy PC, you won't love No Regret. You get the picture.



You'll leave a trail of corpses in your wake.

GAMEPLAY:	A-
GETTING STARTED:	C+
GRAPHICS:	A
SOUND CHECK:	B
OVERALL	A-

Developer: Origin Systems
Publisher: Electronic Arts
800-245-4525
www.ea.com
Platform: DOS CD
Requires: 486/66, 8MB RAM, DOS 5.0, Super VGA, double-speed CD-ROM drive
List Price: $36–$39

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Hard as, well, a rock

Astrorock

By Shane Mooney

This Asteroids remake offers excellent visuals and a rockin' soundtrack.

The year was 1978. Eons of evolution had culminated in a lowpoint in humankind's emotional development. Everyone was stricken with Saturday Night Fever as we grooved to such musical geniuses as The Bee Gees and The Village People.

Little did we know (due to our drug-induced stupor) that those peaceful sounds were wafting into space to soothe and pacify the teeming universe. Now, after 8,000 years of doing the YMCA, all alien lifeforms that have come into contact with those cool tunes have joined together in a sort of futuristic '70s Preservation Society called The Federation of Astro-Rockers.

But, to the utter surprise of everyone in the year 9999, there are some holdouts who are not "down" with the idea of mellowing to ABBA. These aliens have found the music so mind-numbingly horrible that they've decided to venture out and destroy all things associated with rock 'n' roll. (For the record, I'm not making this up.)

It now falls upon you, Zed Nepher, to blast these aliens—mutant aliens, no less—before they can crash the Mega-Millenium bash in the Hendrix system. So you hop into your Fender Astrocaster ANNIHILATOR 9000 and go out to battle extraterrestrial beasties, obliterate asteroids, and finish off anything that can be blown up. No small task, but potentially fun nonetheless.

You'll spend a lot of the game restarting after a quick and painful death.

Astrorock is essentially a '90s version of the '70s smash Asteroids. However, instead of 2D, four-color rocks, you get to destroy fully rendered 3D asteroids and alien ships that blow up quite nicely. And it couldn't call itself Astrorock without a kickin' soundtrack, which it definitely has. Thankfully, it isn't full of disco, but real rock 'n' roll.

There are other differences from the original. In Asteroids, you had only one screen's worth of goings-on, where the rocks would leave the top of your monitor and enter immediately from the bottom. Astrorock is three times that size. You can pick up most of the activity thanks to your little radar screen at the bottom of your monitor.

You'll have to zoom around destroying the asteroids to collect the valuable power-ups, extra lives, and bigger, badder weapons, then lay waste to any alien ships bent on your untimely demise, using your shields and thrusters to stay out of harm's way. Once you've cleared a screen of bad guys and asteroids, you move immediately to the next dastardly level. It's like cockroaches: For every alien you see, there are hundreds you don't—they just keep coming at you from here to eternity.

Unfortunately, to label Astrorock difficult is like saying Microsoft is big. With things flying at you haphazardly (and some intentionally zeroing in on you), it'll take you the better part of an hour before you'll survive more than a few minutes. The game's so tough, in fact, that you'll probably get so frustrated after 30 minutes that you'll (a) take it back, or (b) simply never touch it again.

If you really want to get ahold of a decent reworking of Asteroids, you should look for the excellent Super Stardust from GameTek (yes, GameTek). Astrorock has some nice chrome, but the game underneath is just too tough an asteroid to crack.

TIPS

- **Destroy the asteroids first so you can get power-ups and weapon upgrades.**
- **You'll need to eliminate all the aliens in each sector before you can advance to the next level. Don't wait for them to come to you; you have to go after them.**
- **Turn on your shields and run into asteroids or enemies to destroy them.**
- **Shoot everything. If it doesn't explode, it's something you'll want to pick up.**

GAMEPLAY:	C
GETTING STARTED:	B-
GRAPHICS:	B
SOUND CHECK:	A-
OVERALL	C

Publisher: Atlantean Interactive Games 800-822-8339
Platform: Win 95/DOS/Mac CD
Requires: 486/66, 8MB RAM, DOS 5.0 or Win 95, Super VGA, VESA driver (w/DOS)
List Price: $29.95

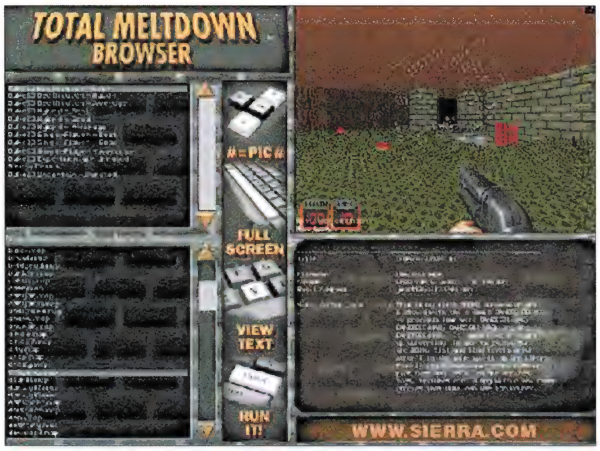
Despite a nice soundtrack and even nicer graphics, this modern-day Asteroids is too tough to tackle.

Duke Level Add-ons

By Peter Olafson

The inclusion of the BUILD editor with 3D Realms' hugely popular Duke Nukem 3D has spawned hundreds of user-created levels for this most detailed of first-person action games. Naturally, a couple of CD-ROM compilations of them were bound to follow. One of these is a class act all around; the other just sort of exists.

The winner comes from Sierra in the form of Total Meltdown. There are enough crawling shadows in Duke already; you don't need to be in the dark when selecting your next adventure. Total Meltdown's superb level browser sheds a welcome light on this process—it's a piece of work. The left quadrants of this split-screen display show level directories and file names, while the right side shows a text description and screen shots of the highlighted level (typically with a transparent map superimposed on the graphic). Down the center divide are icons that allow you to flick between the screen shots, kick the screen and text displays up to full screen, and boot directly to the highlighted level.



Total Meltdown's browser makes finding good maps a breeze.

Moreover, Total Meltdown sets itself apart from many of the Doom and Heretic compilations by rating its 500 levels—best, good, and average—and organizing them by type (deathmatch, solo, and hybrid). Naturally, the opinions expressed herein are somewhat subjective, but any exercise of critical judgment is better than none at all. You'll have a good idea what you're getting in TM, and you'll have an idea if you're getting something good.

By and large, you are. While it's a little early for this sort of compilation—the longer one waits, the better the user-created levels get—you'll find at least a dozen levels here that would have fit comfortably into Duke. Redrum, Prisonr, Hexhouse, and Sand are special favorites of mine, and just pointing and clicking can produce a pleasant surprise. This almost makes tolerable the wait for 3D Realms' 11-level Plutonium Pack add-on (which should be out by the time you read this).

What's a good user map without a bar? Drink up.

Moreover, the browser is only part of the package. Exploration of the CD reveals it as a proper BUILD adjunct, with 35 new creatures—many of them from Sierra's forthcoming Birthright—to add to levels you create, plus a wide range of textures, sounds, and utilities. Any dedicated Duke player or enterprising Duke level engineer would find this indispensable.

Not so with Nuke It! whose compilers apparently had more modest ambitions. This package doesn't offer even the most basic front-end to address its 300-plus levels. Most are assigned, along with any documentation, to eight alphabetical directories. You want to run it? You'll have to copy it over yourself.

Of course, Duke avoids the nuisance of Doom's command line with a setup menu option that allows you to boot directly to a user-designed level. And, to its credit, Nuke It! does make a few stabs at supplementing BUILD's half-hearted documentation and provides a list of Duke cheats, Windows wallpaper, and the odd utility. But after Total Meltdown, this Doom-style comp is way too basic for my tastes.

Blockwar is on both CDs. It's worth a look.

One important note: Litigation by 3D Realms has already resulted in Sierra stopping further production of Total Meltdown, and similar litigation is pending against MicroStar and Nuke It! If you want one of these add-ons, you better run out and get it while you still can.

Total Meltdown
Publisher: Sierra On-Line
800-757-7707
www.sierra.com

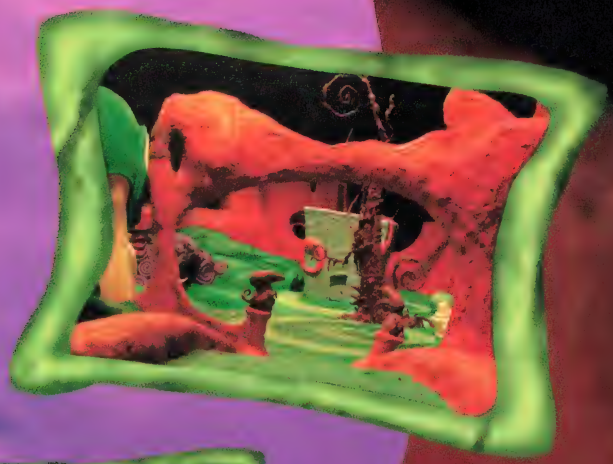
A OVERALL

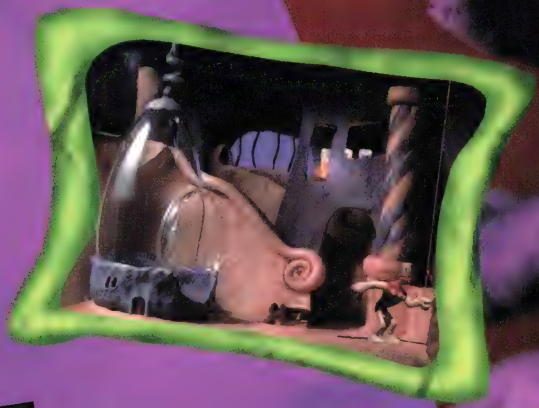
Nuke It!
Publisher: MicroStar Software
800-777-4228
www.microstar-usa.com/

D OVERALL

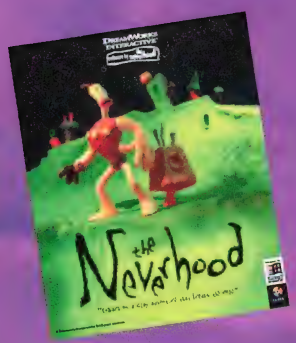
Platform: DOS CD
Requires: Registered version of Duke Nukem 3D, 486/66, 8MB RAM, VGA

Total Meltdown is the ideal Duke Nukem 3D add-on. Nuke It! is a bunch of levels on a CD. Nuff said.





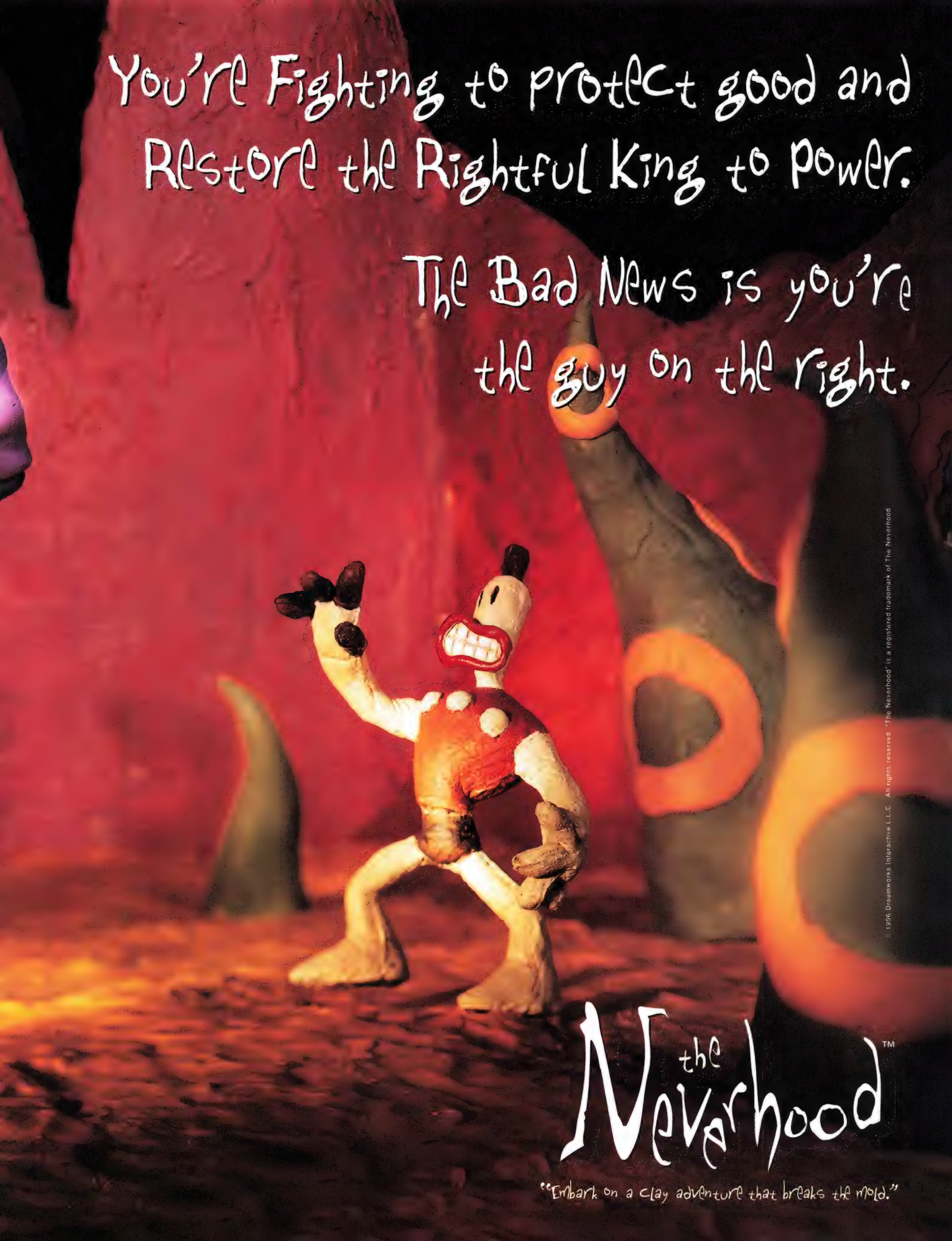
"A winner..."
—LA TIMES



"Clever, an utterly different vision and experience from all the lookalike games..."
—NEWSDAY

The good news is you're a lot smarter than the guy on the left. Good thing, considering you'll have to solve more than 60 puzzles in order to succeed in the twisted, clay-animated world of Neverhood. You'll help Klaymen avoid pitfalls, collect clues, and kick a little clay butt. All to defeat the evil Klogg and bring the Neverhood back to normal. At least, as normal as it ever gets.

DREAMWORKS INTERACTIVE [www.DreamWorksGames.com]


You're Fighting to protect good and
Restore the Rightful King to power.
The Bad News is you're
the guy on the right.
the Neverhood™
"Embark on a clay adventure that breaks the mold."
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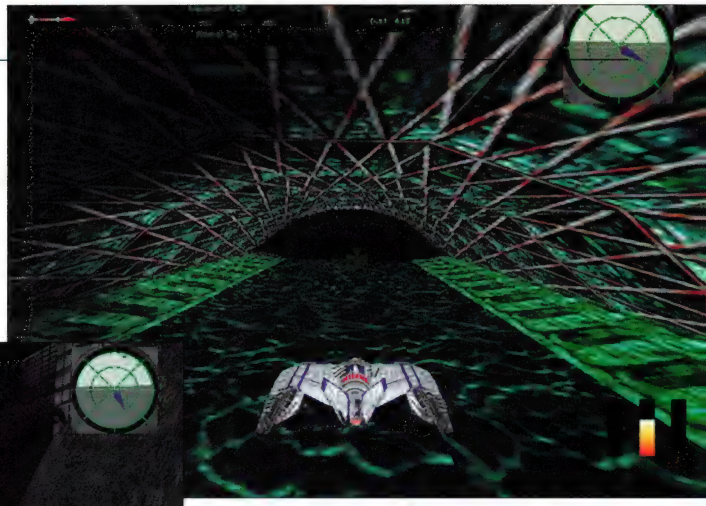
A Jekyll-and-Hyde shooter

HellBender

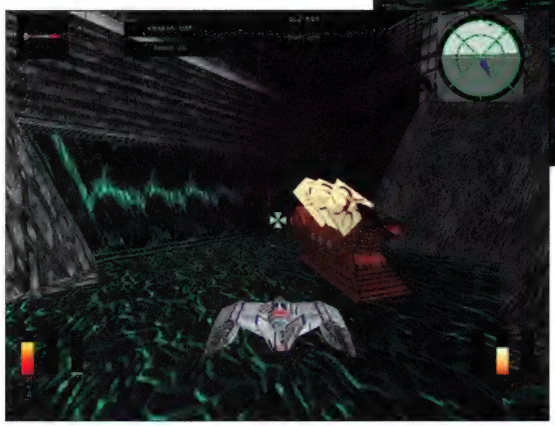
By Steve Klett



Water will actually glisten—with a 3D card.

And so it begins. 3D accelerator cards are hitting store shelves, and gaming will never be the same. Having a Pentium system no longer puts you in the upper echelon of gaming society; now you need a 3D card if you want to play in style.

Case in point: Microsoft's HellBender, the sequel to Fury^3. This futuristic space shooter is among the first crop of titles that support Win 95's Direct 3D API, which means it's designed to work with any 3D accelerator card on the market.



Each world is distinct and full of breathtaking visuals.

So what? Well, we tested the game on both Creative Labs' and Integraph's 3D accelerator cards—both of which are based on Rendition's Vérité chip—and were simply blown away with the game's visceral elements. Yet, this is also where the game pulled a Jekyll and Hyde. It's far more playable and impressive in accelerated mode than it is played normally—even on a beefy Pentium system. But more on that in a bit.

Without a 3D card, pixelation rears its ugly head.

HellBender plays almost exactly the same as Fury^3 and its cousin, Terminal Velocity. It's a kill-everything-in-sight-and-then-some futuristic flying experience.

The game's sci-fi story was written by screenwriter Geof Miller (*Deepstar VI*) and is told via nicely rendered cinematics between missions. An evil alien race, the Bions, is intent on taking over the universe, and it's up to you to stop them. At your disposal is the meanest flying machine ever conceived by the mind of man, which can be made even more powerful with myriad powerups and weapons you'll find scattered about each mission.

You'll need every tool you can find to combat the hordes of Bion forces. Baddies come in all shapes and sizes and become more and more difficult to defeat as you work your way through each world. You'll have access to a range of energy weapons, guided and unguided projectile weapons, and several instruments of mass destruction.

Now, if you're a fan of *The X-Files*, here comes the really good part. Gillian Anderson (Agent Scully on the show) supplies the sultry voice of EVE, the Enhanced Virtual Entity that acts as your onboard mission computer. Delivered in her typical deadpan fashion, Anderson's calm sound bytes reach out to you from the midst of bedlam, ensuring that you have all the vital info needed for the current mission, next mission, and weapon and craft status.

If fragging your friends is more important to you than waxing Bions, not to worry. HellBender offers up some excellent multiplayer fun for as many as eight players over a network, or for two players via modem or serial connection. Microsoft is also planning to add the game to its recently acquired Internet Gaming Zone. As a nice extra touch, you're not limited to flying just the HellBender ship you pilot in the solo game—you can choose to fly some of the alien craft as well.

But HellBender's true claim to fame—with the aid of a 3D card, of course—is its ability to amaze your eyes. If you have added or are considering adding a 3D card to your system, this title is perhaps the best of the early Direct 3D gang to show it off. HellBender's gorgeous texture-mapped 3D terrains, lighting effects, and explosions are truly amazing. Textures remain smooth at close distances, enemies retain their amazing detail up close, and you'll encounter many breathtaking visuals—shimmering waterfalls, lakes, underground caverns—that you won't see in the non-accelerated game.

In fact, unless you are a huge fan of Fury^3 and Terminal Velocity and just have to have more of the same, I can't recommend HellBender in non-accelerated systems—it plays poorly on even high-end Pentium systems and just isn't compelling at all. The exact opposite is true if you have an accelerated PC. If you don't, HellBender may make you take the fast step.

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	B+
UNACCELERATED GRAPHICS:	C+
ACCELERATED GRAPHICS:	A+
SOUND CHECK:	B

B OVERALL

Developer: Terminal Reality
Publisher: Microsoft
800-426-9400
www.microsoft.com
Platform: Win 95 CD
Requires: Pentium 75, 8MB RAM, Win 95, Super VGA, quad-speed CD-ROM drive, mouse
List Price: $44.95

If you've got the hardware, HellBender provides an unequaled visceral thrill ride.

No doubt about it, the sheer number of baddies HellBender throws at you can make it one tough game to master—especially if you have a tough time finding those powerups. Thwart the powers that be by typing in the following codes during gameplay.

- **TOTLPWR: Boosts main ship energy to 100 percent.**
- **URDEAD#: Gives you any one of HellBender's nine weapons; just substitute the # symbol with the keyboard designation for the weapon you want.**
- **MAXMEUP: Boosts hull condition to 100 percent.**
- **IMPUMPD: Gives you all the weapons.**
- **AUNTEM#: Warps you to each of HellBender's eight worlds; simply substitute the # symbol for the world you'd like to conquer.**
- **IMSTUCK: Skips the current mission and advances you to the next.**

Super Weapon Location

HellBender is full of secret areas, but the game's biggest secret is a Super Weapon you can build that will make you virtually invincible. Here's the catch: Pieces of the weapon are scattered throughout the game in some pretty tricky places, and you need to find 'em all to get the weapon. Here's how you do it:

Planet: Morbos, Mission: I

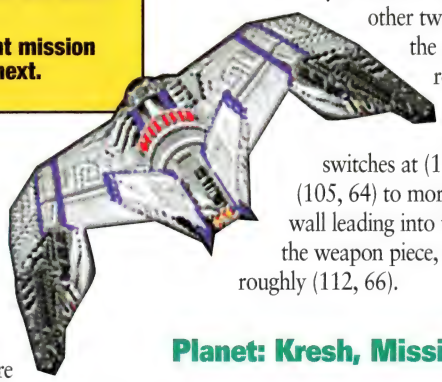
Near the last underground chamber—the one with the two Fusion Reactors—you'll come through a door with a morphing opening. Turn left and follow that tunnel to its midpoint coordinates (115, 24). There is a hidden chamber on the left side: look for a different texture and shoot it. Inside the chamber is a switch at coordinates (115, 23) that opens a door back near where you first entered the underground cavern (19, 55). Enter this door and find the enemies guarding an area with an eagle symbol on the walls. You'll find an open door; through it is the first Super Weapon piece at coordinates (61, 82).

Planet: Eyrie, Mission: II

On the ground area, you will find a large enclosed pool of water underneath a floating rock at (63, 91). There is a building attached to this pool, but you cannot enter it yet. There is a little road that you can follow across some bridges to a switch at (65, 50). This switch will drain the water from the pool. Now go back and shoot the switch by the pool at (65, 84) to open an access door to the next weapon piece, located at approximately (19, 60).

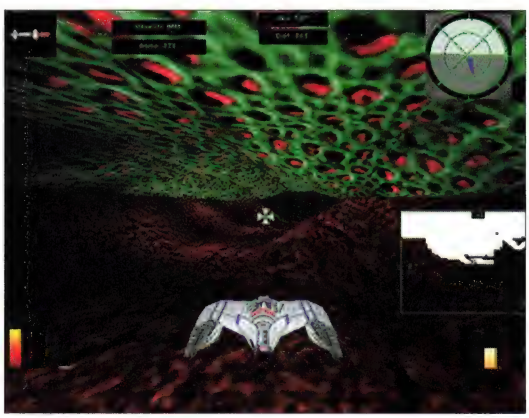
Planet: Iowah, Mission: II

Find the set of three switches in a little alcove. The switch at (90, 97) will morph the wall and open a room containing another switch at (88, 97). This switch will open the walls around the Super Weapon piece—but you still can't get to it. (The other two switches in the alcove open rooms with powerups). Go to the switches at (105, 61) or (105, 64) to morph open the wall leading into the room with the weapon piece, which lies at roughly (112, 66).



Planet: Kresh, Mission: III

This piece is in plain sight under a building at (59, 99). Trouble is, you can't get to it directly; the only way to get it is through the underground chamber system. Once you are almost done with the mission, you'll come across a tunnel with purple metal on the ground. Follow it to the end and go up through the ceiling to get into the building where the Super Weapon piece is stored.



Time to do a little spelunking in your HellBender.

Planet: Chimera, Mission: III

This piece is in an area that will force you to do a lot of running back and forth to get it. Locate the underground chamber and the first switch at (48, 71). This switch will open a building on the surface at (54, 58). Enter it and go down into a little chamber with four switches. Shoot the switches at (54, 53), (54, 58), (49, 58), and (49, 53) to open up the four barriers back in the chamber where you opened the first switch (48, 71). The switches above open the barriers from (48, 65) to (48, 68). Go back to the first chamber (48, 71) and shoot the wall at (47, 66) or (47, 67). The wall will morph open and reveal the chamber holding the Super Weapon piece, which is in the middle of the room at (43, 66).

Planet: Asteroid, Mission: IV

There are ground switches at (8, 107) and (10, 111) that open a chamber, which you need to enter quickly (the door will close after eight seconds and won't open again). The switch to open the Super Weapon room is at (19, 109) and will open the doors at (16, 104). Check the ground near this switch and you will find an X-shaped pattern designating which switch to shoot to enter the Super Weapon chamber. You'll find the weapon part near (16, 98), as well as a bonus mission objective. To get out of this area, shoot the X-marked boxes.

Planet: Snow City, Mission: II

The first switch to open the Super Weapon chamber is located in a doorjamb at (33, 30). This switch will open the wall at (102, 81), which leads into the weapon chamber. Inside, you will find four switches. The Super Weapon switch is at (105, 78)—the other switches hold a nasty surprise—and it will open the walls surrounding the piece, which is located at roughly (109, 82).

Planet: Shiva, Mission: I

This piece is just hidden out in the middle of nowhere. Locate the ship at (107, 11), and find the one box that has a different-colored texture on it. Shoot this box and enter the little building there. The final piece of the Super Weapon is sitting in the center of the room. Grab it, and there's no way those Bions can stop you now!

Kill everyone—anytime, anyplace

Time Commando

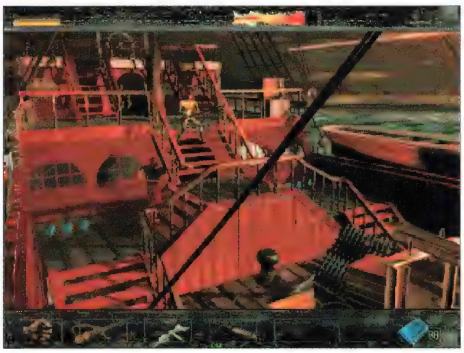
By Corey Cohen

You'll be a master swordsman after the Japanese Middle Age.

Ten minutes ago, you were a million years away—relaxing on the job, playing a futuristic version of GameBoy. That's how it was in 3984, and you didn't know how good you had it. But you do now. You've been tossed through time like a volleyball, and you can't help wondering where you're going to land next. You collect yourself as best you can, and then wander over to a man in a furskin. He looks friendly enough, like he might even try to help you...and then BOOM!!! He plants a fist in your face.

What'd you expect? Time Commando gives you time travel in the great arcade tradition: Go back and kick the crap out of our hostile ancestors. There's no philosophizing about the possibilities, no concerns about influencing history, no stopping to enjoy the clean air. Time Commando is simple slaughter with no pretenses. And it's one hell of a good time.

Of course, the full storyline, told mostly in an animated intro, helps ease your tender conscience: As Stanley Opar, an elite technician for the Federation of Europe's military combat-simulation, you've been sucked inside a futuristic supercomputer. Trapped in a life-or-death simulation generated by a deadly cybervirus, you must fight your way through nine virtual worlds—re-creations of Earth's more exciting time periods—before your final showdown with the software bug that brought you here.



Only one way out: through those two sailors.

That last battle's a long ways from Prehistory, the first of the game's 18 action-packed levels (two per time period). There, you'll get a handle on your three attacking moves and your jumping ability as you slug it out with cavemen, apes, a saber-toothed tiger, and other jungle denizens. While playing Tarzan, you'll figure out your other, less interesting goal—finding memory chips. It's all part of the quickly forgotten story: To delay the virus, you need to find as many clean chips as you can and deposit them in various memory stations in each level. Take too long between dropping chips, and you're history.

It may add a little tension to all the fighting, but this chip hunt gets pretty annoying. Who wants to rush through a good brawl, especially when there are so many of 'em to be had? With more than 80 different people, animals, robots, and aliens, you'll get plenty of one-on-ones, two-on-ones, and the occasional you-vs.-the-mob. In the Japanese Middle Age, you'll face the cast of the wildest kung-fu movies: nin-

We're not sure *what* that creature is—but it dies real good.

• Like many arcade-style games, Time Commando rewards the reflex (i.e., spaz) factor: punching, stabbing, etc., as quickly as possible while cycling through the various moves. Strike with the up key, left key, right key, left key, and so on, and you'll win many fights through sheer savagery. • Along the same lines, you'll want to stick with some of the lighter, faster weapons on certain levels—the katana (lighter sword) on the Japanese Middle Age, the Aztec club on Conquistadors. Killing each opponent as quickly as possible will let you beat multiple attackers. • Near the beginning of Modern War, you'll hear bombs dropping. When you do, hit the forward arrow and the spacebar simultaneously to dive for cover. • On the second half of Modern War, watch out for the tripwires. There's only two of them, but they're lethal.

jas, samurais, sumos, and a fire-breathing dragon. Crossing the towns and desert of the Wild West, you'll tackle cowboys, Indians, sheriffs, and outlaws. Here, and in the other levels, everybody wants a piece of you: old miners, busy farmers, field hands—even a woman you save from becoming a human sacrifice.

Well, hey—bring it on! If you're used to the 10-weapon assortment in first-person games, you'll love Time Commando's huge, historical arsenal. You've got an average of four different weapons per time period, each with authentic looks and sounds. You'll make Mars proud as you storm Ancient Rome with a dagger, sword, sling, trident, and ax. Years later, you'll face the forces of the Future with a plasma gun, cannon arm, plasma grenades, and other technomarvels.

The Future's a scary place.

The sheer number of weapons creates a whole new level of anticipation for each era. You never know when you might find a blowgun, throwing stars, dynamite, a rocket launcher—everything humanity's developed over the years for tearing flesh and smashing bone.

It's truly a battle for all time, and Time Commando's graphics do the action justice. The polygonal 3D characters look and move realistically, if a bit stiffly: Bears lunge, bulls charge, wizards spin, and skaters roll, all in the kind of polygonal look reminiscent of Quake. Start thinking about that game, and you'll wish your enemies bled when you killed 'em, instead of shattering into little bits. Still, these creatures are nicely integrated with the pre-rendered backgrounds. Overall, the graphics are wonderful, despite a few odd spots where the sharp, defined characters tend to contrast with murky backgrounds.

What matters more than the game's looks is exactly *how* you see the game unfold. Time Commando's roving camera follows the action from an amazing number of viewpoints (even changing in midfight), giving the game a genuinely cinematic quality that's a pleasure to behold. At the same time, this movement lets you fight your attackers from some truly unique perspectives—diagonally overhead, you in the background and them in the foreground, and many more. Unlike some other third-person action games, the shifting perspectives don't stifle the action. In fact, they do wonders for livening up what might otherwise have been overly repetitive fighting; after all, how much variety can you get out of only three punches/kicks/stabs/swings with your weapon of choice? Thanks to the camera, a lot more than you'd think.

See that target in the distance? That's you.

Why this cinematic sensibility didn't carry over to the soundtrack is a bit of a mystery: The music isn't terrible, but it's a lot more boring than the gameplay deserves. With some rockin' tunes or a more dramatic score, Time Commando could have reached whole new levels of intensity.

Would that have made up for the game's biggest flaw, the fact that you can't backtrack? No way. There's nothing more frustrating than spotting one of the game's many secret rooms, and finding that you've moved just a little too far past it to nab the powerups or extra lives hidden inside! This is easily the most annoying part of the game—at times, almost maddening.

Is it enough to lower the grade? Not much. Break it all down, and this game is a simple, arcade-style beat-'em-up that happens to be beautifully presented, full of variety, and very fun to play. That's more than enough for this brawler—in any time period.

Aim, fire—and watch those Indians go to pieces.

GAMEPLAY:	B+
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	A-
SOUND CHECK:	B+

B+ OVERALL

Developer: Adeline Software
Publisher: Activision
800-477-3650
www.activision.com
Platform: Win 95/DOS CD
Requires: 486DX/66 (Pentium 90 recommended), Win 95 or DOS 6.22, Super VGA, VESA local bus or PCI video, double-speed CD-ROM drive, mouse
Estimated Street Price: $49.99

Loads of variety and stunning perspectives make this simple beat-'em-up a memorable trip.

Get your motor runnin'

Road Rash

By Peter Olafson

One good kick leads to another. What do you think is harder: your helmet...or that hydrant?

Go ahead: drive angry. The superb Windows 95 translation of Road Rash preserves—indeed, enhances—all the lunatic speed and enthusiastic violence of this classic console motorcycle racing game, which first appeared on the 3DO.

Road Rash puts you on a basic cycle (you'll get bigger and better ones) for a mad-cap race through five twisting, richly texture-mapped courses: city, suburbs, the Sierra Nevadas, Napa Valley, and the Pacific Coast Highway. You can kick, punch, club, and chain your 14 opponents off the track—or play it clean—while weaving through (and sometimes driving over) pedestrians and assorted obstacles.

It's a blast. The tracks look wonderful. I mean, just look at the pictures. They've got the healthy glow of reality—they're almost spookily realistic—and the 25 frames-per-second speed is peerless. The building fronts in the city are splendidly detailed, and out in the countryside, you'll find everything from cows to highway workers to yuppie hikers. This is a racing game you'll want to explore while keeping pedal to metal.

Sometimes you'll get to see the scenery close up: When you're thrown from your bike, you'll have to hoof it back to where it fell. (The program will take you there automatically, but may throw you in harm's way in the process.) And unlike EA's other recent driving game, The Need for Speed, there's just enough real estate on the sides of the road to make things interesting if someone gives you a nudge at an inopportune moment.

Moreover, it's not 14 against one; you'll see your competitors fighting with each other and having their own accidents. You'll find forks in the road that can vault you ahead in the standings, and if you're unlucky enough to have an accident in the wrong place, you'll be pulled over and fined by one of a range of sadistic cops.

Once you've qualified on all five tracks, you move on to the next level (there are five in all), where the rally is longer, twistier, and has better opponents, more obstacles, and more traffic. Even if you've played Road Rash before, getting through Level Three should put you in a sweat.

You go shopping here. The shop. That's the Diablo on the left.

Between races, you can take counsel from your raffish colleagues—all drawn in caricature with huge chins and pinheads—or use your prize money to shop for better wheels while listening to some great head-banging tunes.

Is this port on par with console versions? Easily. On a 133MHz Pentium, it performed at least as well as the PlayStation version—and at twice the screen resolution, in full-screen Super VGA.

The other big difference is the ability to play via modem or with up to seven other players via a network, which overflows with mayhem potential.

Of course, the violence will probably put off people of delicate constitution, but it's bloodless and all in good fun. No matter how catastrophic the accident, you'll always survive to ride another day.

In fact, it's downright comical: One time, I lost it on a curve, went through a tree, bounced off a bus shelter, a phone booth, a roadside sign or two, and a pedestrian before slamming into a wall. Then I got run down four times on the way back to my bike.

By the time I'd stopping laughing, I was in last place.

With all this harmless fun, I could do without the post-race videos—they're just nasty. In one particular sequence, an unwilling young woman is slung across a motorcycle, legs kicking, and driven off with a hooting crowd in pursuit. What was EA thinking?

Luckily, you can turn off the videos. Without them, Road Rash is easily the best motorcycle racing game for the PC. With them, it's still a great game—it just leaves a sour aftertaste.

PC GAMES A LIST

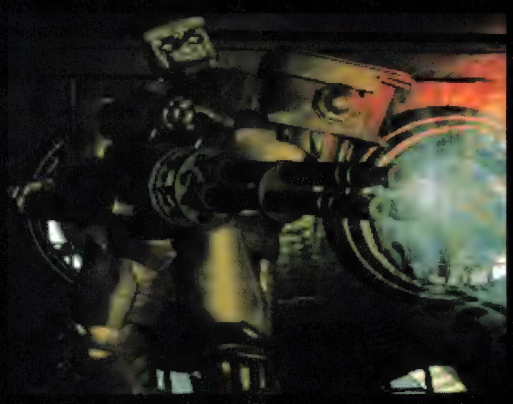
TIPS

• Don't let the level at which you're driving get ahead of your bike or your pocketbook. Buy the best bike you can whenever you can. • Not every fork in the road is an opportunity to make up time; some will actually slow you down. Map them out so you'll know which way to turn. • After an accident, don't run back to your bike on the blacktop. Stay on the sidewalk or the shoulder. That way, you probably won't get creamed by one of your pursuers.

GAMEPLAY:	A
GETTING STARTED:	A
GRAPHICS:	A-
SOUND CHECK:	A
OVERALL	A-

Publisher: Electronic Arts
800-245-4525
www.ea.com
Platform: Win 95 CD
Requires: Pentium 90, 8MB RAM, Super VGA, DirectX
List Price: $59.95

Road Rash lets you get your kicks—and punches, and clubbings—on Route 66.



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Defender for the Pentium age

Scorched Planet

PLAY the Demo on the disc

By Rob Smith

Multiple views of your ship and buggy give you a full picture of where those little blue humans are hiding.

I'm sure there are few people who would argue with the claim that Defender was one of the greatest video games of all time. It was fast and furious—too fast, I recall, having piled pockets full of quarters into it. Early games were simply a case of getting used to the frenetic controls. The humans in desperate need of rescuing could just forget it.

That simple concept—aliens abducting humans—has been re-invented for the Pentium class of the '90s in Scorched Planet. Criterion Software, the company behind the Renderware 3D acceleration software, licensed its technology to third-party developers; parent company Canon formed Criterion Studios as the games division of its software arm. Scorched Planet is Criterion's first product.

Criterion Studios gladly acknowledges that the arcade classic was its inspiration, as evidenced by the unique, instant 180-degree-turn maneuver that your ship can pull off with the same dexterity as Defender. These days, though, we also get treated to some very neat rendered and FMV video introductions in a game that makes Defender show its age.

Lizardlike creatures are a problem for the buggy.

One important differentiator is the intense strategic thinking needed to succeed in Scorched Planet. Seven missions, each covering three stages, play out a story that puts you in the hot seat of a rescue attempt. Every 10,000 years, a swarm of insects migrates on a path that devours everything in its wake. The 15-year-old Earth colony of Dator 5 has just discovered that it lies right in the middle of this route. Panic!

As the only available help, your task is to take your morphing vehicle to this doomed planet and rescue as many humans as possible. That leads to the strategy elements that set Scorched Planet apart from the simple arcade blaster mode that made Defender so popular.

For one thing, the Type 16 craft at your disposal morphs at the touch of a button from a ground-based tank buggy to a nifty, maneuverable fighter aircraft. Ammo and fuel are limited, so picking which transport method to use is just one vital strategy.

With each mission, you need to rescue a set number of humans. To do this, you need to collect them on the ground and then fly them through the spacegate—a series of quarko-magnetic hoops. Sounds simple. But there are hordes of voracious Voraxians trying to ensure that they get to the humans first. It would be easy to spend your time blowing away rabid bees, lizards, and spiders and collecting the fuel and ammo powerups strewn around the planet and hidden in secret storage bunkers. But the mission objectives require much greater strategic thinking.

As many as 10 different weapons can be used during the course of your battle,

GAMEPLAY:	B+
GETTING STARTED:	B-
GRAPHICS:	B+
SOUND CHECK:	C
OVERALL	B+

Developer: Criterion Studios
Publisher: Virgin Interactive Entertainment
800-874-4607
www.vie.com
Requires: Pentium, 8MB RAM, double-speed CD-ROM drive, sound card
List Price: $39.95–$49.95

While doffing a reverential cap at an arcade classic, this update and upgrade offers gameplay that's well worth the Pentium power needed to run it.

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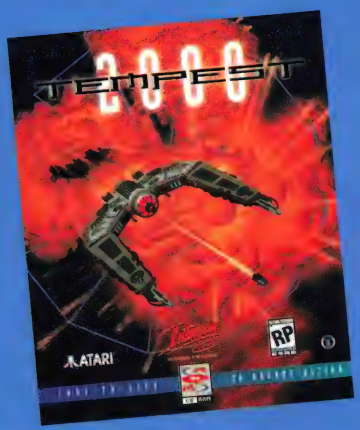

Excitement. Destruction. And killing. It's Tempest 2000. With over 90 levels of challenging game play, bonus warp worlds and evil enemies. Hey we'd like to say you're ready this time. But that would be a little premature, now wouldn't it?

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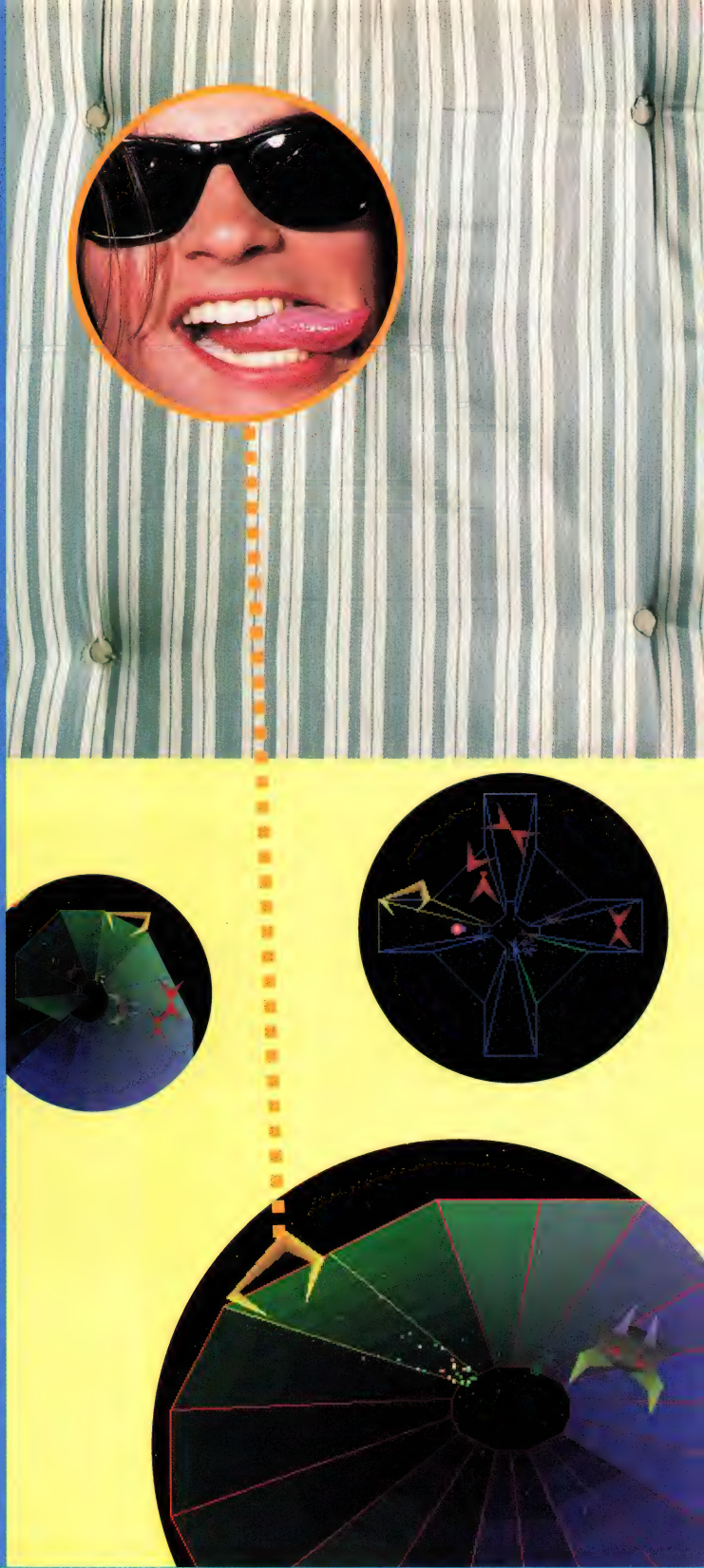

ALSO AVAILABLE:

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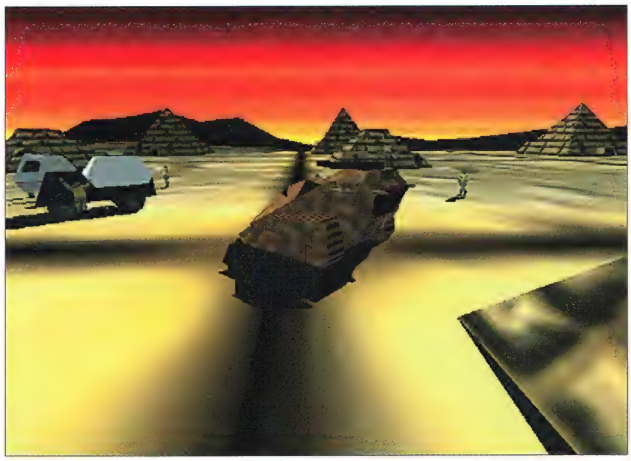
Bees and pterodactyl-like avians prove to be a real annoyance during rescue attempts.

along with a host of other items, such as beacons, guns, anti-venoms, hang-gliders, and attractotrons. The humans in need of rescue are spread throughout the various cities in this 3D world. In later missions, the monsters grow faster, more numerous, and more cunning, and a careful tactical plan is needed to stave off attacks in one location while managing to gather the people for rescue in another.



You get stunning scenery if you have a powerful enough machine.

Spiders roaming these cities can turn the normal humans into zombies, which can then infect "clean" humans. Setting up an anti-venom beacon will attract the zombies and cure them. All the while, there are other battles raging. Fortunately, you can call on the help of some soldiers on the ground who use gun emplacements and fight for themselves until you get around to organizing the full retreat.

The terrain also plays a significant role. Cities based on islands may need bridges built to get the humans to safety. Humans hiding on high outcrops may find hang-gliders helpful for getting down when your buggy refuses to climb the steep incline—that means morphing to ship state and then carefully firing the gliders at the right moment so they land on the plateau. These are just a few of the strategic elements that help make Scorched Planet a pulsating, frenetic action shooter. It's a race against time and a test of tactical awareness, strategic planning, and piloting and driving skills.

Flying or driving around the scenery is simple. Your tank buggy is very sturdy and will always right itself should you roll down one of the steep embankments. In both vehicle types, the radar is crucial for helping you assess the importance of reaching certain humans at certain times.

All this, and a network option, too! Eight players can play a deathmatch or a "savematch" over an IPX network from one CD. The deathmatch is the familiar scenario, but the savematch adds the element of point scoring in trying to rescue as many humans as possible.

Scorched Planet pads out as a surprisingly in-depth action shooter for a game that makes no bones about its resemblance to Defender. The strategic elements really are cunning, and the three difficulty levels will test the trigger finger and grey matter to extremes. Adjustable video settings can make the landscapes extremely detailed, should you have the processing power, and the sound effects are fairly decent, although the repetitive alert music when an attack wave is detected soon becomes grating.

Getting used to calling the humans and dispatching them, allowing them to help themselves by supplying the right weapons, and judging just when to use the repelatrons and other items is far from easy. While the missions are structured to gradually introduce these aspects, they take some getting used to. The bottom line is to persevere, because the new features that enter the game over the very different seven stages are worth seeing, and will test your gaming brain.

• Civilians can't help you fight like soldiers can, but they can help you find powerups. • Remember, powerups can only be collected while driving the tank. • Wait for the city beacon to appear when a settlement is under attack. All the humans will head toward this beacon. If you're quick, you may be able to evacuate an entire settlement by grabbing the beacon and simply dropping it outside the city. • In mission 7, take out the Voraxian power generator's red wing sections first to destabilize it. Then fly inside to deploy your bomb and get the hell out of there—quickly. Game over.

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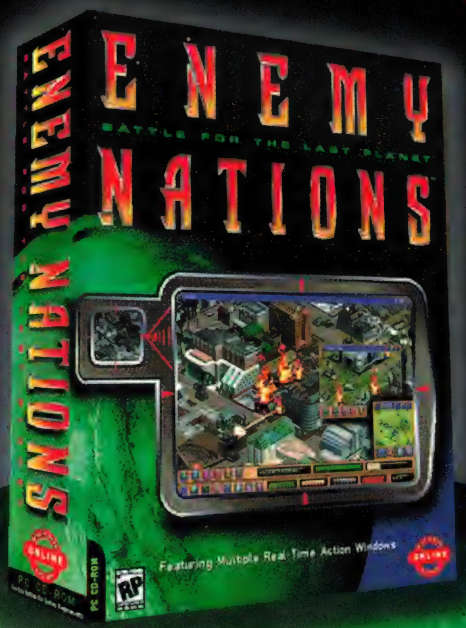

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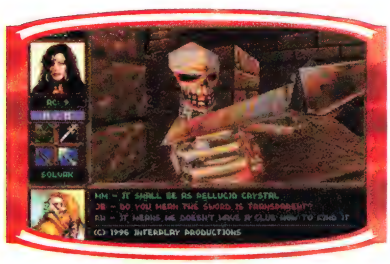

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Out of its league

In Pursuit of Greed

By Daniel Morris

Shocking. Positively shocking.

When action gamers sleep, they dream of gorgeous 3D game environments, grimly challenging levels, and addictive first-person mayhem. Their dreams look a lot like Duke Nukem 3D.

Their nightmares? They look like In Pursuit of Greed.

Mind Shear Software has given us Greed, a highly repetitive and thoroughly unimpressive first-person shooter that takes two steps back from the current state of the art in 3D shoot-'em-ups. Greed doesn't stack up against Doom, much less Quake or Duke.

You are one of five hunters in a future where corporate decadence has spawned gladiatorial games for the amusement of the masses. You're hired to provide fresh meat for the labyrinths of three different game worlds: an orbital penal colony, a military base, and an occult city-temple.

Get aggressive. Get psychotic. Get bored.

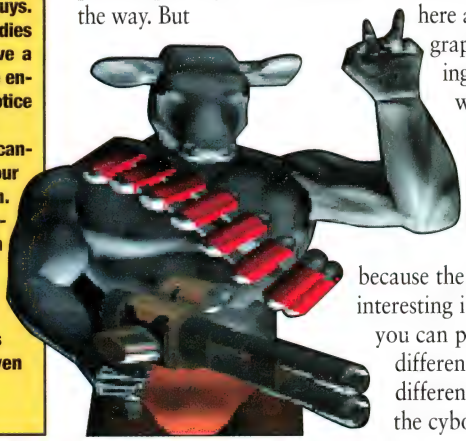
In each world, you're tasked with killing anything that moves, whether it be rioting inmates, spell-casting high priests, galactic shock troops, or fearsome assault rovers.

As in every other 3D gorefest, different weapons and items can be picked up along the way. But unlike some of the better games in this genre, In Pursuit of Greed limits these to a boring and largely generic selection: autocannon, rocket launcher, medkit...yadda, yadda, yadda.

The levels themselves are devoid of the kind of inspired architectural gags that keep Duke on his toes. Greed's mazes are pretty simple and there's not a lot to them; most of the game's early goings-on consist of solving a maze in a few minutes, then just waiting around for the computer to regenerate enemies for you to mow down so you can earn enough points to advance.

The harder settings ("Aggressive," then "Psychotic"—you know the drill) throw more target practice at you, but when the computer does generate a challenge, it's always thanks to a prestaged ambush.

Perhaps the most unforgivable crime here are the punchless graphics. The surroundings are flat and sleepy, while enemies move in jerky, random fashion, following you like Frankenstein monsters.



It's too bad, really, because the game wastes some interesting ideas. For instance, you can play as one of five different hunters—each a different species/type. There's the cyborg, minotaur, lizard man, beastly Specimen 7, and dominatrix (she moans when she gets hit, if that's your thing). That adds some variety to multiplayer games, where players can be different characters, each with its own ratings for damage, shields, jumping ability, and so on.

Also of interest are a couple of cool gadgets that can enliven the maze-clearing tedium. The most notable are proximity mines, motion scanners, and a holographic suit that allows you to permanently take on the appearance of an inanimate object near you. You can then walk around looking like a crate or a corpse. (Note to deathmatchers: shoot any moving crates!)

Unfortunately, there's just not enough to overcome the outdated graphics and lackluster levels. With competition from Quake and Duke (and soon Prey, among others), In Pursuit of Greed is no more than a blip on someone else's motion scanner.

TIPS

- **Don't bother using the Clone. He'll end up doing more damage to you than to the bad guys.**
- **Lure computer baddies into a room and leave a proximity mine at the entrance. They never notice them on the ground.**
- **Turn off the heat scanner and leave only your motion scanner on. Otherwise, you'll confuse corpses with breathing bad guys.**
- **Never assume the starting chamber is a sanctuary. Enemies can infiltrate it even when you're there recuperating.**

GAMEPLAY:	D
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	C-
SOUND CHECK:	C+
OVERALL	D+

Developer: Mind Shear Software
Publisher: Softdisk
318-221-8718
www.softdisk.com

Platform: DOS CD
Requires: 486/33, 8MB RAM, DOS 5.0
List Price: $19.95

This outdated 3D shoot-'em-up will seem like boot camp to veteran space marines.

Cyberdillo

This game could have been fun—two or three years ago.

The early buzz on Cyberdillo was that it would display a sense of "Doomor"—that this 3D action game would make you laugh instead of scream.

As it turns out, all Cyberdillo makes you do is sneer. I admire this first-person shooter's ambition to separate itself from the many Doom clones, but that's where my admiration ends. The game is too predictable and too technically primitive to be much fun.

You steer an armed 'dillo through 11 themed, multistage levels searching for items (disco duds on Level 1), avoiding hazards (like spiked balls), and firing weapons (like plumber's helpers) at a range of enemies.

GAMEPLAY:	D-
GETTING STARTED:	C
GRAPHICS:	D
SOUND CHECK:	B
OVERALL	D-

Publisher: Panasonic Interactive Media
888-726-2543
www.panasonic.com/cool
Platform: Win 3.1/Win 95 CD
Requires: 486DX2/66, 4MB RAM, double-speed CD-ROM drive
List Price: $24.95

The graphics are shareware-basic. The enemies are uninspired. And the scrolling is often too fast: I occasionally found myself stuck, vibrating, between a wall and an opponent. Some potentially interesting wrinkles in the game engine—sloping floors and the ability to jump and look up and down—are canceled out by the relative simplicity of the levels. Cyderdillo doesn't even have the gameplay complexities of Wolfenstein 3D.

Sadly enough, the humor—an in-game Magic 8-ball and objectives like relieving yourself on flowers and sniffing dog butts—doesn't really add anything. Did I laugh? Well, I did once. The sliders in the setup menus move a car in and out of the distance. Move it far enough up, and it will punt an armadillo, which, at the time, was funny.

Once you get past the bizarre veneer, Cyberdillo remains a Wolfenstein/Doom spinoff with mediocre graphics and limited gameplay. Don't bother with this one. —*Peter Olafson*

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More than your average Myst clone

Timelapse: Ancient Civilizations

By Peter Olafson

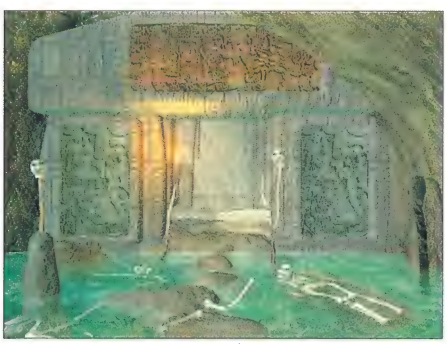
Timelapse gives new meaning to photorealism—as this Easter Island screen attests.

Welcome to the Myst of time.

In Timelapse, a graphic adventure for Windows and Macintosh, you're charged with following a professor (whose over-the-top enthusiasm and light, close-cropped hair remind one of Steve Martin) through the time portal he has uncovered. You'll travel into Egyptian, Mayan, and Anasazi worlds, and finally to Atlantis, where you'll encounter one of seven—count 'em, seven—distinct endings.

Sounds nice, yes? It is nice. Timelapse's grip is soft but durable, and often enchanting.

Admittedly, Timelapse wears adventure-game conventions on its sleeve. From the moment you appear on Easter Island (a small world in itself), your screen-by-screen progress is hindered by puzzles.



The Mayans were fond of sacrifices.

The Chameleon's color holds the key to opening the door behind it.

There are more than 50 of them, some small and simple and others gravely difficult and multi-stepped. As in other games of this type, you'll profit from a willingness to look in every available direction at every turn and to click on anything that looks remotely as though it wants clicking. The game performs some tricky directional gymnastics here and there, making it easy to miss something important, but the mouse pointer is your friend: It cooperatively becomes an arrow when you can move or turn in a given direction and a pointing hand when it passes an object with which you can interact.

The not-so-conventional side of things emerges a bit more slowly and quietly. Photorealism, for instance. This is one of those words that gets thrown around a lot within the games industry—it does sound nice, doesn't it?—and is applied to all sorts of shiny, modeled environments that, while undoubtedly very handsome, aren't a bit like photos.

But Easter Island, where the game begins…ah, now *this* is photorealism. The fragrant green hillsides are oh-so-perfectly captured, as are the great grey rocks that mark the shore, the sudsy wash of the sea, and those heavy-browed stone heads. Why did I play this part of the game three times? Why am I thinking about it even now?

Well, that's the whole point of photorealism: If you do it right, it puts you in the place. You can almost smell the high grass and breathe the air. You don't just look in every direction because you have to, but because you want to—because what you see, and the promise of what you might see, keeps you going. I came for the time portal, but I stayed for the view. In Timelapse, even incidental views are often striking.

Puzzles are the traffic signals in the typical graphic adventure, and they have a tendency to be relatively simple affairs. If there's a button, you push it. If there's a round hole, and other holes nearby are supplied with pegs, then you can bet there's a round peg

TIPS

• The professor's camera can be found beside a rock on Easter Island. (Watch for a lone gull.) • Instructions for lighting the gas lamp in the cave can be found at the abandoned camp. So can the means for making an etching of the symbols on the stone you'll find here. • Tip the rock above and to the left of the statue that creates heads from lava. It's a water basin, and will cool the lava enough for you to collect the heads. • In Egypt, you'll need six baskets of water—but not all at once—to free the boat.

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Here's where you enter the Anasazi World. The crow suggests a good starting direction.

You've found it—the lost city of Atlantis!

The Guardian Robot awaits your arrival.

lying around in some 3D Studio backwater waiting to be collected. (Game designers sure don't give us much credit, do they?)

True, Timelapse pulls a few of those same "peg" puzzles. But it does it with some extra flair in its signature—like the clever use of morphing lava heads near the beginning of the game.

Some of the puzzles have a triumphant, absorbing depth with the texture of literature or a physics experiment. I'm thinking especially of a Da Vinci–like exercise in water and weight necessary to free a boat in the Egyptian portion of the game. It was time-consuming and a half, and I botched it many times before I solved it, but if it hadn't been so difficult, I wouldn't have felt so immersed. When the gate finally opened and the boat crossed the river, I felt in some palpable way that I had paddled it there with my own hands. Perhaps I had.

Intricate detail and lighting effects abound.

There also tends to be a lot of running around in these games, covering and re-covering the same territory. It's not necessarily a bad thing; the game becomes a second home, and you could almost play with the monitor off. But it can be something of a nuisance. Not here: Timelapse allows you to warp across explored terrain (although you can actually race through intermediate screens quite speedily with multiple mouse clicks).

I also like the new tool the game adopts—the professor's camera. If you can find it, this device can be used to capture images you come across for later reference. Like a real camera, it has a limited number of exposures, so you'll have to use it carefully.

Those multiple endings, I'm happy to report, are more like proper multiple endings. No, they're not a product of your creativity or speed or thoroughness through the full course of the game (I hope we'll see something like that in the future). But all too often, games supply this desirable feature—in theory, to deliver a high level of replayability—by attaching a couple of animations to one key decision point late in the game. You can do this for one ending, or you can do that for a second ending, or you can drop dead—that's three endings. Not in my book, or Timelapse's either.

I don't want to give anything away, but the foundation of the endings isn't so simple. While they do spring from events toward the end of the game, they are triggered by distinctly different actions at different places. You'll have a reason to cover and re-cover the same terrain. When the game ends, there's still something to see.

I should tell you that I had some trouble getting my pre-release copy to run under Windows 95, but it did perform very nicely under Windows 3.11 on a 120MHz Pentium. If you don't have them already, you'll need to install the Windows graphics accelerator WinG and the 32-bit Windows extensions, which are provided on the first of the four CDs.

Does Timelapse have any other lapses? None really, apart from its basic similarity to Myst in a market fairly glutted with Myst-type games. Timelapse isn't really a revolutionary step for this genre. It's very much a descendent of Myst—that is, a lively multimedia slideshow punctuated with logical subgames.

But it is a pleasant evolutionary step forward—if just a baby step—in which vaunted adventure-game concepts come to mean a little more than they did before. You'll have a good time with Timelapse. In fact, you may have seven of them.

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	A-
GRAPHICS:	A
SOUND CHECK:	B
OVERALL	B+

Publisher: GTE Entertainment
619-720-9134
www.im.gte.com
Platform: Win/Mac CD
Requires: 486DX2/66, Win 3.1 or Win 95, 8MB RAM (16 recommended for Win 95), Super VGA, double-speed CD-ROM drive, mouse, sound card
List Price: $59.99

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A Graphical Adventure

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GTE Entertainment

CYBERFLIX

This comedy isn't funny—or fun

The Improv Presents: Don't Quit Your Day Job

By Barry Brenesal

You can look, and look, and look some more, but you won't find much entertainment here.

Comedy, as someone once said, is no laughing matter. So it seems in Don't Quit Your Day Job. This is possibly the least appetizing graphic adventure I have ever played, and definitely the single most depressing thing I have witnessed this year. Given that this is an election year with two national political conventions, you can understand just how truly unpleasant Don't Quit Your Day Job is.

The story—what there is of it—is quickly told. You've been hired as a talent scout for the *Johnny K. Show*. You get to see two very cliché-ridden young comics in the folders in your limo, and you must choose one to champion. (This is why Philips bills it as two games in one: two separate comics, you see. Right. I was excited, too.)

Can you get a booking for your client at the Improv?

The idea is to get your performer into the Improv lineup, after which you can legitimately claim to Johnny K. that you've found someone sensational. (The fact that Don't Quit Your Day Job was produced by Improv ManyMedia, of course, has nothing to do with the Improv's inclusion as a kingmaker of comics.)

To accomplish your goal, you must approach a variety of people at the Improv. You automatically garner the right responses if you click on folks in the right order. There are virtually no choices to make. In fact, as a graphical adventure—or adventure of any type—this game is literally nowhere. It does not involve object manipulation or multiple questions emphasizing shifts of mood. It doesn't even let you blast away a la Doom at the various overdone, wretchedly unfunny comics you encounter along the way. (Angela the boozing agent: "I've got a spot you can do. My G-spot." Blecch.)

The idea is to make you screw up, to annoy somebody—anybody—at the Improv enough so you end up getting flushed into Hell's Basement. Once there, you have to conquer the Curse of the CD-ROM Hallways and 16 inadequate mini-games (like Shoot the Heckler) to make it back upstairs. All the while, you're getting hints for your actions in the form of very bad standup comedy from your chosen alleged comic.

Did I say very bad? I meant it. Most of the humor from all concerned is the kind only the mother of the comic could truly love. Far from being all original material as the box art advertises, the first few lines spoken by the limo driver include a close variation on a joke in a comedy written by William Gilbert (of Gilbert and Sullivan fame) in the 1870s. And when the lines aren't ancient, they're all too easy, with the occasional exception. There's also the standard parodies of TV shows, and obvious sex gags. ("She's not my type. Know what my type is? Twins.")

That's right, he's laughing at you. Why? Because you're playing this game.

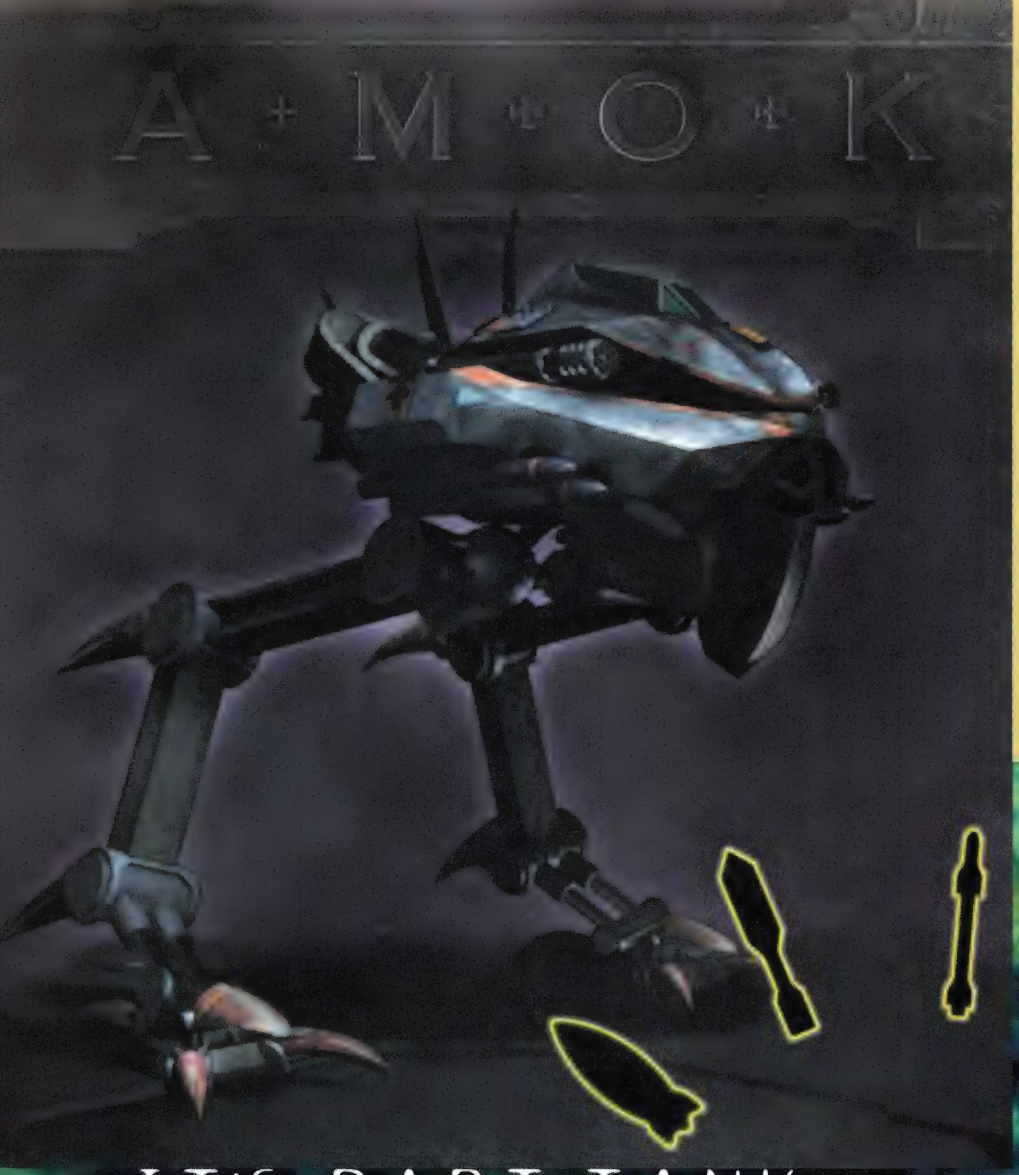
That's not to say the Improv Comedy Club itself doesn't offer superlative standup comics. It does—just look at its roster. But the club isn't involved with Don't Quit Your Day Job—probably because it'd rather avoid treatment for distemper. Avoid this dog at all costs.

GAMEPLAY:	F
GETTING STARTED:	C
GRAPHICS:	D
SOUND CHECK:	C
OVERALL	F

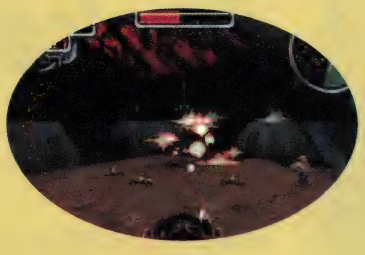
Publisher: Philips
800-883-3767
www.philipsmedia.com
Platform: Win 3.1/Win 95 CD
Requires: 486/33, 8MB RAM, double-speed CD-ROM drive
List Price: $49.99

A graphical adventure with no gameplay to speak of and truly horrifying "humor."

A·M·O·K



ABOVE GROUND



UNDER WATER

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AND ULTIMATELY,
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LOOKING COFFIN.

PC CD-ROM

TEEN T AGES 13+ CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

SCAVENGER

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GT Interactive Software
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Where's the magic

Shadoan

By Rob Smith

Sometimes the best way to deal with bullies is to fight back.

Anyone recall the graphic adventure Kingdom: The Far Reaches? Shadoan is the prequel to that animated family adventure, padding out the history of Five Kingdoms with more heroics needed from Lathan, savior of the land.

With a style taken straight out of some high-fantasy fairy tale, an ancient artifact—the Hand—is broken into five pieces by the heroic Mobus to prevent it from falling into the hands of his dastardly brother, Torlock. The latter is twisted by envy and has brought his lizard hordes into the lands, slaying all in their path. The Argent Kings, who had reigned over the Five Kingdoms with benevolence, are defeated and a reign of terror begins.

Red dragons like their mounds of treasure, and they're clever.

Years later, a descendent of the Argent Kings has raised a son, Lathan, who is strong with magic. The reclusive wizard Daelon trained this young fella before he was forced out into the great outdoors to track down the five pieces of the Hand. By the time you pick up the story, Lathan has already recovered three items—he just needs to find the final two.

Princess Grace Delight proves to be a useful ally, but the way is fraught with danger. Given that this is an animated adventure from the creators of Dragon's Lair, you can probably guess the style of gameplay. Some beautifully drawn backgrounds illustrate scenes that can present problems or provide information and clues on how to achieve certain goals. But the old problem with Dragon's Lair's gameplay is also evident: there's very little to do. Occasional clicks to use an item do not make for enthralling action.

Mystical tomes open up new areas for adventure.

A very simple point-and-click interface guides Lathan's actions. A simple map aids traveling around the different locations, and a pouch (allegedly a small piece of the Abyss of Time) acts as the inventory. Dialogue with the characters Lathan encounters along the way is automatic—you don't get any options to respond.

Options do emerge when you're threatened with danger, however. In the Scrying Glass below the main view window, a few of the items from Lathan's inventory will appear when needed, and an hourglass will turn, limiting the amount of time you have to choose which item to use. Get it right, and Lathan dances away from the danger. Get it wrong, and his fried bones need resurrecting.

Depth and involving gameplay are conspicuous by their absence, but that isn't exactly the point of Shadoan. This is a family adventure, and is constructed as such. The novice level allows younger gamers to get involved in the story by removing many of the trickier puzzles, whereas experts can take on the full challenge.

What Shadoan offers in abundance is a story. It won't win a prize for contemporary fiction, but the plotline is layered with enough color and panache to satisfy young adventurers.

Solid graphics (particularly in 16-bit mode), original music, and the classic struggle of good against the nasty bad chaps make Shadoan a completely average game. There's nothing to inspire and nothing to despise. The two CDs feature a wealth of tales to uncover, although the going will be repetitive and dull for any experienced, hardened adventure veteran. This game's one for the kiddies.

TIPS

- Don't visit the Woodcutter's Hut: it's a trap.
- Get away from the Norse soldiers quickly.
- A scroll will help at the Last Inn.

GAMEPLAY:	D
GETTING STARTED:	C+
GRAPHICS:	B-
SOUND CHECK:	C
OVERALL	C-

Publisher: Interplay
800-468-3775
www.interplay.com

Requires: 486/66, 8MB RAM (16MB for 32,000 colors), double-speed CD-ROM drive, mouse, sound card

List Price: $39.95

Shadoan offers a strong story for younger adventurers, but seasoned gamers will find nothing new.

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Isis

Unless you're a huge Earth, Wind & Fire fan, stay far, far away from this one.

Well, this is rather grim. Having released more than 20 games for the 3DO, Panasonic is hardly unschooled in the gaming art. But its first venture into computer games is an antique QuickTime graphic adventure for Windows 95 and Macintosh that seems more dedicated to celebrating the legacy of the band Earth, Wind & Fire than keeping us entertained.

Bad idea.

QuickTime was all the rage when CD-ROM games were just getting off the ground in the early '90s. Your typical QuickTime game is rather like walking around inside a big rendered model in scripted steps: You see the burnished sights, you search for hotspots, you collect inventory objects, and, if you use 'em in the right place, you get to watch an animation. But QuickTime's never exactly been a model of interactivity, and it certainly isn't in this attractive but overly simplistic Egyptian-inspired treasure hunt.

You're searching for jewels to power the Isis, a music-carting galleon from another world, with occasional helpful appearances in video overlays by the young lady from whom it takes its name. The acting is roughly on par with airlines' in-flight safety videos.

Alas, there are just three of these jewels, and they're far too easy to find. The game only lasts the few hours it does because it makes you run all over creation, and it doesn't really have any puzzles per se. For instance, rather than have you figure out how to simultaneously operate the controls that reveal a distant gem and grab the gem itself, the designers have Isis hit the button for you.

Then there's the whole Earth, Wind & Fire business. The band hasn't been incorporated in the story so much as plopped down on top of it. One in-game gadget displays video clips of band-member interviews. (They use more clichés than baseball players.) Another displays a tiny clip of a live performance. (You get a bigger one if you win.) Big deal.

Ultimately, Isis seems more an element of a promotional campaign than of an adventure design. Skip it. —*Peter Olafson*

GAMEPLAY:	D
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	B
SOUND CHECK:	C
OVERALL	D

Publisher: Panasonic Interactive Media
888-726-2543
www.panasonic.com/cool
Platform: Win 3.1/Win 95/Mac CD
Requires: 486/66, 8MB RAM, double-speed CD-ROM drive
List Price: $24.95

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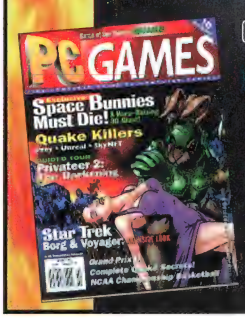

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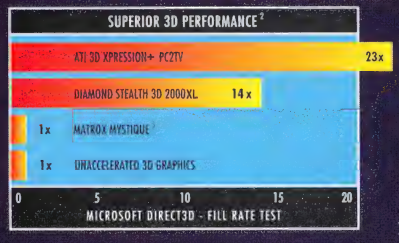
Smooth Video Scaling	●	●	
Performance (WinMarks)[1]	40.7M	35.9M	35.5M
Price	$199 (2MB)	$219	$199



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Fire in the Middle East

Back to Baghdad

By Peter Olafson

Some textures! It's rather drab, but hey—it is the desert.

You can't buy this kind of publicity. As I sat down to write up my impressions of Back to Baghdad, Saddam Hussein came alive again. The Iraqi army had overrun a Kurdish stronghold and was threatening another, and U.S. forces had launched a retaliatory cruise missile strike.

That timing gives a certain resonance to this sim's dopey James Bond–like premise of nuclear blackmail. In 1997, Saddam announces possession of four hydrogen bombs and makes known his intentions to detonate them over Washington, London, Tel Aviv, and a city-to-be-named-later unless outrageous conditions are met.

That means it's time for you to go to work, and there's plenty of work to go around. You can fly nearly 50 missions in this Pentium-only F-16C sim: three "instant action" missions (where you find yourself already airborne), 13 training excursions, and 32 active-duty missions of all description.

Unfortunately, Back to Baghdad's timing proves one of its few saving graces. I found my interest in this high-end flight sim—evidently aimed at a hard-core audience—quickly flagging on a number of scores.

First off, there's the terrain. Much of the sim is set over desert, whose textures appear only when your altitude drops under about 12,000 feet. (Otherwise you see only a vast expanse of tawny ground.) The developers obviously could not do anything about the sand—war is where you find it—but they should have provided more in the way of buildings or hills to give the game a greater sense of dimension.

The controls are realistic—and intimidating. I could count on both hands the keys that the game doesn't use, and when I looked at the elaborate in-game dashboard (you have to peer down at your knees to see it all), I felt out of my league, and I've flown my share of flight sims. Thankfully, there's a separate sheet that describes the keyboard and dashboard layout.

The controller itself was a problem, too. When using the keyboard, it was a constant challenge to keep the fighter's nose level with the horizon without overcompensating. This wasn't much fun. Mouse control was too fluttery—the plane was all over the place—and my CH FlightStick wasn't directly supported. (The game only supports two Thrustmaster controllers.) I'd have had to manually edit a configuration file to use my stick. Thanks, but no thanks. That's the game programmer's job, not mine—especially when you pay the high $99.95 suggested retail price.

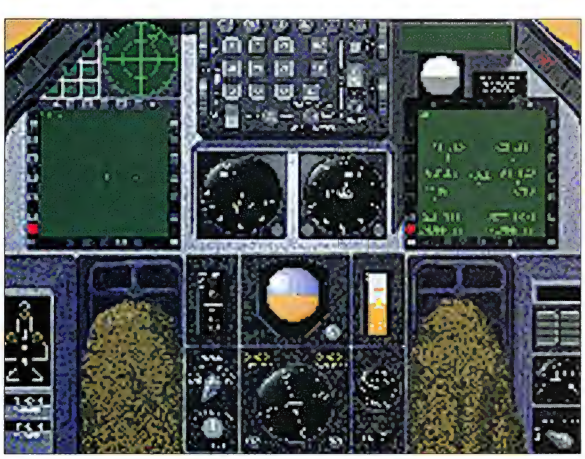
The 77-page manual is a mixed bag. It's thorough, with lots of diagrams and detailed descriptions, but some of the most detailed accounts are written for the Thrustmaster controllers, and some of it is steeped in technical language not described in the glossary or index.

While I don't usually hold forth on game intros, this one's a little tacky, with grainy video and a whiny rock song.

I did like the mission setup screens (though they're slow), with a zoomable 3D view and scrolling map. And I enjoyed the freedom of being able to fly any mission at any time, rather than being forced to follow a sequence of events.

Another departure is the Nuclear Option. While a lot of flight sims stick to conventional weapons, Baghdad gives you the option of dropping the Bomb on Iraq—specifically, the B-61 tactical nuclear weapon—while trying to prevent Saddam from dropping the Bomb on us.

For some reason, this made me uncomfortable. And discomfort pretty much sums up my response to Back to Baghdad. I do like a good flight sim, but here, again and again, I felt lost in a world that offered small rewards for hard work. Hardcore flyers may dissent, but I think I'll just watch this one on TV.



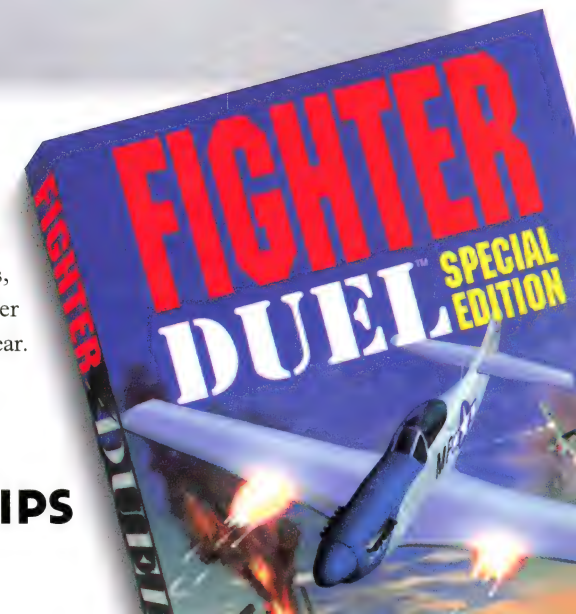
Eeny-meeny-miney-moe...

GAMEPLAY:	C-
GETTING STARTED:	D
GRAPHICS:	C
SOUND CHECK:	C-
OVERALL	C-

Publisher: Military Simulations 360-254-2000
Platform: DOS CD
Requires: 90MHz Pentium, 16MB RAM, DOS 6.2 with Smart Drive, a VLB or PCI Super VGA video card, double-speed CD-ROM drive, sound card
List Price: $99.95

Back to Baghdad has some nice features for hardcore flight-sim fanatics, but value, simplicity, and eye candy are not among them.

With *Fighter Duel's*™ new 9-player network capability, you can now have all the enemies you need. And with its improved flight models, more aircraft and force-feedback joystick support, it's no wonder *Computer Gaming World* considers it one of the best simulation games of the year.



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PHILIPS

Searching for Bobby Fischer, via modem

Chessmaster 5000

By Daniel Morris

He's out there somewhere. I know it. Hiding in some log cabin in the woods where no one will ever find him, he's cruising the Internet looking for a worthy adversary to stare him down across the chessboard in cyberspace.

Somewhere, Bobby Fischer is seeking an online opponent for Chessmaster 5000, and I'm determined to find him.

Mindscape's Windows 95–native game is as good as or better than any chess program to date. Best of all, the company has devoted a Web site to modem play, featuring chat rooms and player areas where prospective opponents can scout each other out and arrange an online match. Sure, I may never locate Fischer, but Mindscape's site at **www.chessmasternetwork.com** offers opponents of all skill levels.

Chessmaster 5000 is a complete chess package that offers a highly customizable chess game, plentiful instructions and tutorials, sharp artwork, and a comprehensive online resource. It's all you could want from digital chess.

• Take the time to get fitted; this is no place to jump in and swim. Play the computer at its easiest levels and let the mentor determine at what skill level you need to be developing. • The 3D boards are pretty, but they can get distracting in the heat of a match. Start out on the flat 2D boards until you get comfortable. • Learn an opening gambit and then stick with it. Once you develop a solid opening strategy with the mentor's help, it's the foundation for the rest of your game.

As a player who's always had a tough time visualizing chess on a screen ("Oh God, I didn't even see that queen!"), I'm happy to report that Chessmaster's eye-friendly graphics mean you won't have to suffer any boneheaded errors because you couldn't readily see all the angles of attack on the board.

If you're the kind of person who digs unique chess sets, you'll be happy to see the wide array of sets and boards available here. Sadly, there's no *Star Trek* set (the grooviest one in existence), but there are 28 others to choose from, including Roman, Napoleonic, fantasy, and even dinosaurs. The dozens of boards include 2D and 3D options of every classic make and model, with some wild tag-alongs like the Dali-inspired Surreal Landscape.

If you don't like those, you can customize your own. Check out a sample of board-creation in the screen on this page (and don't judge too harshly—I only spent a minute on it).

It's all part of a system very high on tweakability. The game comes with 30 computer opponents, from Brute Force (who attacks with every move) to Defensive Architects, and all manner in between. You can tweak such characteristics as risk-taking, randomness of play, and contempt for draw. Or you can tweak them all and save the new template as a character.

You can also play against one of the game's digital mock-ups of actual grandmasters, past and present. The roster here includes Fischer, Boris Spassky, Anatoly Karpov, and Garry Kasparov. Try 'em when you need a humbling. (Alternately, you can watch them play each other—for instance, you can fire up Fischer circa 1972 vs. Kasparov from 1996.)

Besides offering a bunch of chess in a bunch of settings against a bunch of computer opponents, Chessmaster 5000 is intended to be the end-all-beat-all of chess instructional programs. Your computer mentor will walk you through every move of every match if you want it to, guiding your hand while explaining some of the finer points.

Beginners receive instruction in chess notation and the basics of opening theory and engagement. Moderate players are encouraged to develop opening gambits and solve for mate multiple turns in the future. I don't have any idea what advanced players learn, since their section was indecipherably complex, but I guess you can't have a university without ivory towers.

Tired of the hum-drum? March the rank and file through the Surreal Landscape, one of several offbeat boards.

A chessboard designer's kit lets you build the board of your dreams; here's one of ours.

The point is to improve your game over the course of matches, tournaments, and, most intriguingly, the online play to which the Mindscape chess site is devoted. When we do find Bobby Fischer and he challenges us to a match, we'll be ready for him. Or maybe not...

GAMEPLAY:	B+
GETTING STARTED:	A
GRAPHICS:	B
SOUND CHECK:	B-
OVERALL	B

Publisher: Mindscape
800-234-3088
www.mindscape.com
Platform: Win 95 CD
Requires: 486DX/66, 8MB RAM, 256 colors, double-speed CD-ROM drive, mouse
List Price: $45

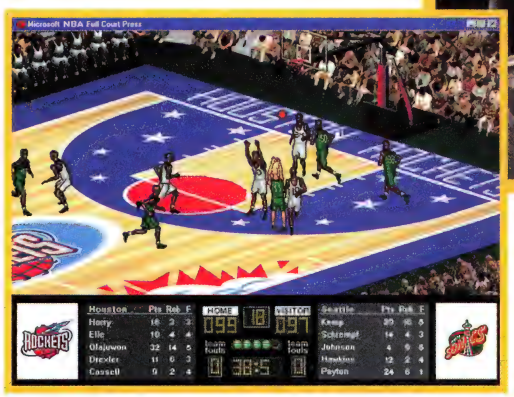
With sharp graphics, highly customizable play, and online play, this is the grandmaster of chess games.

You've always been a tad

TOO COMPETITIVE AT HOOPS.

Well, this surely won't help matters any.

Finally, some PC roundball that lets you play just like in the gym. In other words, like a maniac.



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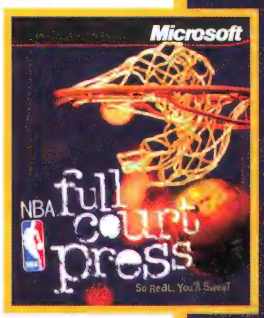

Microsoft offers a line of sports games for the terminally competitive.

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Are you ready for some TV?

ABC's Monday Night Football

By Willem Knibbe

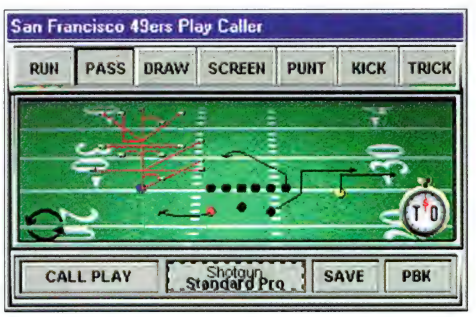
OverTime Sports' ambitious entry into PC sports puts you right in ABC's broadcast truck, but not on the field.

The game feels incredibly familiar, as it should—about 50 million people, myself included, watch *Monday Night Football* every week. When you boot up the game, there's Hank Williams Jr. belting out the opening song about his rowdy friends.

Next thing you know, you're in the broadcast truck. From MNF's "virtual broadcast" interface, you pick your teams, tweak the rosters, look at NFL Films' highlights, enter or continue a season, get pregame reports, and set game options. Click on the big screen and it's game time.

And look—Al, Frank, and Dan are in the booth. Lynn Swann's down on the sidelines, and Chris Berman's in the studio. It really feels like it's a Monday night, but without the commercials.

I was impressed by the accuracy of the pregame commentary (complete with graphical stats where appropriate) and in-game announcing. Sure, it's a bit choppy at times ("Jerome Bettis…runs for a gain of… four…yards."), but after I'd made a catch over the middle and got crushed by two DBs, Dan commented on how tough it is to hold on to the ball in traffic. After a march down the field, Frank complimented my play calling (but he did the same thing once when I was sacked for an 8-yard loss).



The route tree lets you easily choose what patterns your receivers run.

The graphics are passable. They're sprites, not polygons, but the animations are good. You'll be more impressed with the sound effects, especially the crowd noise. It seems as if it's surrounding you, and the crowd reacts to what's happening on the field.

The single coolest feature in MNF is the ability to tweak a play on the fly. Say your wide receiver is scheduled to do a down-and-out pattern but you want to go deep. Click on him in the Play Calling window and presto! a route tree with every possible pattern appears. Click on the path you want him to take, and that's it. If you like your new creation, save it to your playbook with the click of a button (and take note of the name it's assigned—you don't get to name the play yourself). It's not just receivers' routes you can modify. You have complete control over blocking assignments, which way the running back runs, where a defender blitzes, etc.

Snow in Miami? The Bears like it.

It's the easiest play creator I've ever seen, but I'd trade it for more compelling gameplay and AI. You can't control the direction or strength of your kicks. You can't control the speed and trajectory of a pass. You can't control the receiver when the pass is in the air. Where's the diving grab? Where's the straight-arm? Where's the head-first leap over the pile?

And where's the coach? The computer-controlled team makes some pretty bad decisions, like consistently going for it on 4th and long in a scoreless game. And it almost always goes for the two-point conversion after a TD.

Now it's really time to pull out the penalty flag: You can't play someone on the same PC. That's right, you can't sit down with your friends and play Monday Night Football. The only two-player capability is via modem or LAN.

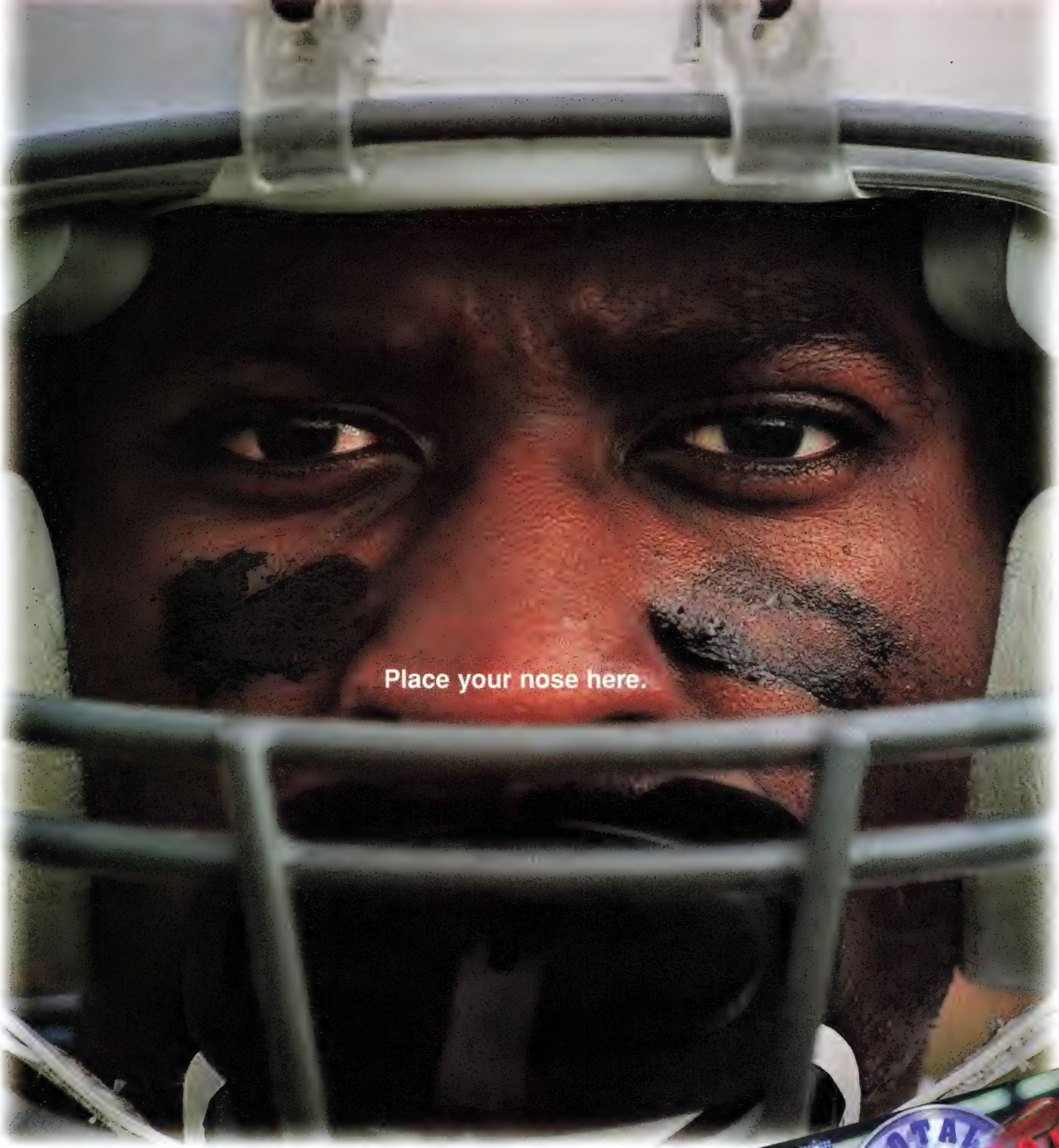
If you have the horses (it didn't run well on a P100 with 16MB of RAM, but was good on a P133 with 24MB of RAM), MNF's presentation is so professional that you really can sit back and almost believe you're watching a telecast. If you're the cerebral football fan who likes to track stats, create plays, and watch your meticulous strategies unfold, MNF offers enough to sink your teeth into, especially with the play editor. But if you want to feel like you're strapping on a helmet and jumping into the fray, Monday Night Football isn't quite ready for prime time.

• Screen passes work well, especially against deep-zone defenses. • Throw passes as soon as you see your receiver open. You might be inclined to wait for him to get downfield, but by then he'll likely be covered. • The Field Goal Block play is very effective against runs. • The B button is crucial on running plays. Hit it just as the defender gets close and you'll spin right by him. • Tackling is tricky—the defenders don't lunge as far as you'd think, so make sure you're pretty close to the runner before going for the stick.

GAMEPLAY:	C-
GETTING STARTED:	C+
GRAPHICS:	B
SOUND CHECK:	A
OVERALL	C

Publisher: OverTime Sports
410-771-8550
www.otsports.com
Platform: Win 95 CD
Requires: Pentium 75 or higher, 16MB RAM, Super VGA, double-speed CD-ROM drive, two-button mouse, Hayes-compatible 14.4 modem for head-to-head play
List Price: $49–$59

Al, Frank, Dan, and all their rowdy friends are here, but the gameplay isn't.



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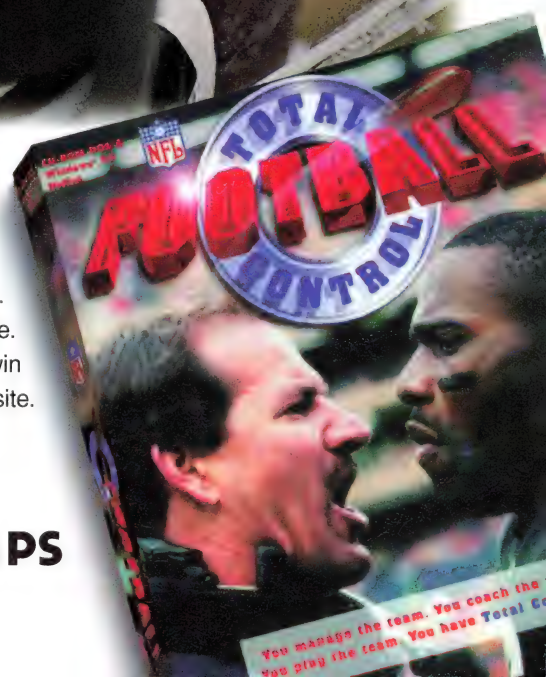

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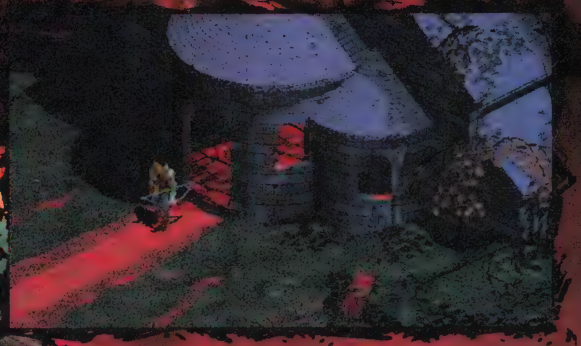

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Striker '96

By Shane Mooney

Striker '96 includes indoor soccer.

There's just nothing compelling about this soccer sim.

Lining up for the penalty kick.

The recent explosion of soccer titles is proving one of two things: (a) Either the U.S. is finally catching up with the rest of the world's soccer enthusiasm, or (b) software developers are determined to flood every niche of the market with at least a dozen titles. Whatever the answer, given that football, baseball, basketball, and golf have pretty much been tapped for all they're worth, developers have turned their attentions to soccer sims.

The good news is the release of some fairly solid titles, like FIFA Soccer '96 and, to a lesser extent, VR Soccer '96. On the downside, we're starting to see a lot of other soccer games that look like they were rushed to market before they were ready. Striker '96, had it been released five years ago strictly for console systems, might have been pretty good. But as it is, it draws a red card.

What can I say? Us gamers are a spoiled lot. We demand sophistication in our games. And we demand realism: no cheap imitations allowed. Striker isn't a complete flop—it does include several nice, if ordinary, features. You can pick one of dozens of teams from around the world. You can opt for Friendly or Competition games, which in turn allow you to set up for four different tournaments, including Trophy or League matches. There's also the option of Arcade and Simulation modes, as well as all the other goodies that come with most sports games, such as top-notch sound effects and network play for up to four players.

It sounds great, but as soon as you boot up the game (especially if you've played FIFA), you can't help but notice where Striker comes up short. The graphics have a very cardboard-cutout movement to them. Instead of running across the field realistically, the players glide like skaters and jump ridiculously high off the ground. And where FIFA used real athletes and many of their unique attributes, Striker uses imitation soccer stars. Now, when I play a sports game that pretends to offer a professional sports atmosphere, I want control over the real players.

It's particularly distressing that there's no practice mode to let you work on your maneuvers and iron out passing and shooting without playing a real game. Striker is a sink-or-swim affair wherein you have to learn during the game while the far more experienced computerized opponents kick your butt up and down the pitch.

The game does offer a decent multiplayer option that lets two or even four people fight it out on the same system, even if most of the time you're just frantically hitting buttons in hopes of scoring.

If you were to ignore everything else that's on the market, Striker '96 wouldn't be a bad game. But if you're aching to get real instead of real annoyed, there are much better soccer games to be had.

TIPS

- **Forget about trying to win your first few games. You need to concentrate on learning the ropes first, even if it means getting stomped. Begin by playing in Arcade mode for awhile.**
- **Analyze your individual player's stats so you can be sure to put the right people in the right position—in the game or on the sidelines.**
- **A gamepad, especially a Gravis GrIP system, will make a world of difference in play.**

GAMEPLAY:	C-
GETTING STARTED:	D
GRAPHICS:	B-
SOUND CHECK:	C+
OVERALL	D

Developer: Striker '96
Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment
516-656-5000
www.acclaimnation.com
Platform: DOS CD
Requires: 486DX2/66, 8MB RAM, DOS 5.0, double-speed CD-ROM drive, sound card
List Price: $39.99

No practice mode, imitation players, and an overall lack of realism keep Striker out of World Cup contention.

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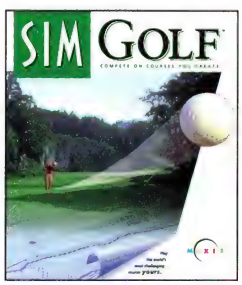

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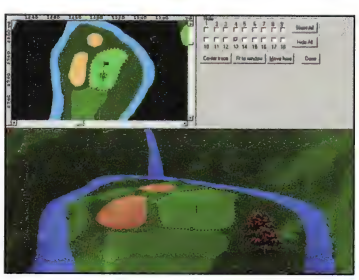

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A wargaming smorgasbord

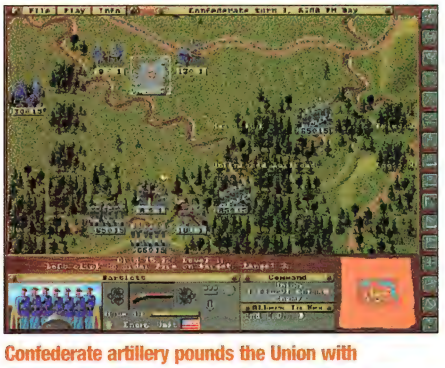
Age of Rifles: 1846–1905

By Daniel Morris

They were the last of the romantic wars—bright uniforms, elaborate banners, marching musicians—in the last epoch of warfare, before the Machine Age made armed conflict the meatgrinder it is today. Strategic Simulations Inc. has forged this fascinating era of battle into the latest addition in its Wargame Construction Kit series, with Age of Rifles: 1864–1905.

When it comes to this oft-neglected swatch of military history, Age of Rifles is definitive and comprehensive, with a wide scope of conflicts to re-enact and retool, if so desired. Along with a thick Civil War campaign, you'll find just about every armed conflict, major and obscure, that the era saw. About the only thing missing is an Alamo scenario—you'll just have to build one yourself, like I did. (More on that in a sec.)

The wargame itself is par for SSI's course, borrowing heavily from its enormously successful General series—Panzer, Allied, Fantasy, etc. The combat is turn-based, tactically oriented, and very dependent on good maneuvering to secure victory.



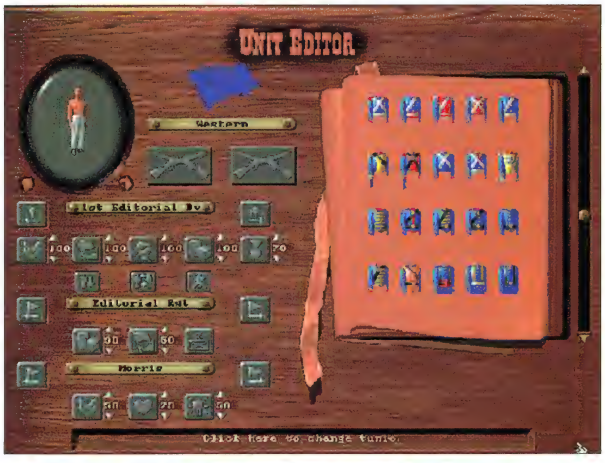
Confederate artillery pounds the Union with counterbattery fire from the safety of the treeline.

GAMEPLAY:	B+
GETTING STARTED:	B-
GRAPHICS:	B-
SOUND CHECK:	B-
OVERALL	B

Publisher: Strategic Simulations Inc.
800-601-7529
www.ssionline.com
Platform: DOS CD
Requires: 486/66, 8MB RAM, DOS 5.0, Super VGA, double-speed CD-ROM drive, mouse
List Price: $45

A definitive scenario/campaign editor highlights this rich, comprehensive wargame-construction package.

But the joy of Age of Rifles is its complete and total designability. If you're a wargame buff and have always had a hankering to give scenario and campaign design a try, here's your chance on a silver platter. A unit editor allows you to customize troops with many ethnicities, dozens of uniform possibilities (from regal Prussian to robed Arabian to American Indian), and hundreds of weapons (from swords to Maxim guns, plus cavalry and artillery).



Indulge your guilty hobby of costume design as you serve as your army's personal tailor.

Once you've created an order of battle for both sides of the conflict, set up your scenario. My first scenario featured several brigades of Japanese samurai swordsmen bracing for a charge by a ton of Mongolian cavalry—in the snow. OK, so I was just learning the system. But my next scenario was a meticulous reconstruction of the siege of the Alamo, and by designing the battlefield hex by hex with the game's map editor, I was able to achieve a truly cool encounter.

Now for the best part: The campaign editor allows you to link your scenarios together in branching fashion to form a campaign with alternate courses depending on the outcome of the previous battle. For example, if my Alamo scenario ends with the defenders holding out for 10 turns, Texan reinforcements arrive and the next scenario presents Mexican leader Santa Ana with a formidable new foe. If the Alamo falls in nine turns or less, those reinforcements are too late and the next scenario finds Santa Ana charging at the scattered volunteers.

TIPS

• If the computer keeps getting the better of you in your home-made scenario, try tweaking the morale levels a bit. • Look for holes along the enemy's flank where he may have left avenues open to his artillery. Then pour in a cavalry charge to knock out the cannon. • Maintain a healthy rear reserve to send units into breakthroughs along the line. Remember: reinforce success.

Fredericksburg: the Civil War at close quarters.

The scenario editor's complete control over battlefield design includes placing objectives, assigning values to their defense and capture, and even selecting the time and location of reinforcement arrivals. (To quote comic-book scribe Frank Miller, choosing the right place to fight may be important, but there's nothing like having a bunch of your friends show up with lots of guns.) You can even write the introductory text to the scenario/campaign.

Sorry to say, there's no network or modem play; all you get is play by e-mail. Obviously, that's a disappointment. While it may be fun e-mailing your friends your latest elaborate campaign, actually playing it is going to be more work than it ought to be. Too bad, as this would be a perfect modem game.

Age of Rifles is for the kind of meticulous wargamer who used to stoop over an Avalon Hill board wishing he could just take a pen and make a few nips and tucks. Here, you're offered total surgery. It's not the best wargame in the world, but Age of Rifles provides history's amateur rewriters with a marvelous tool.

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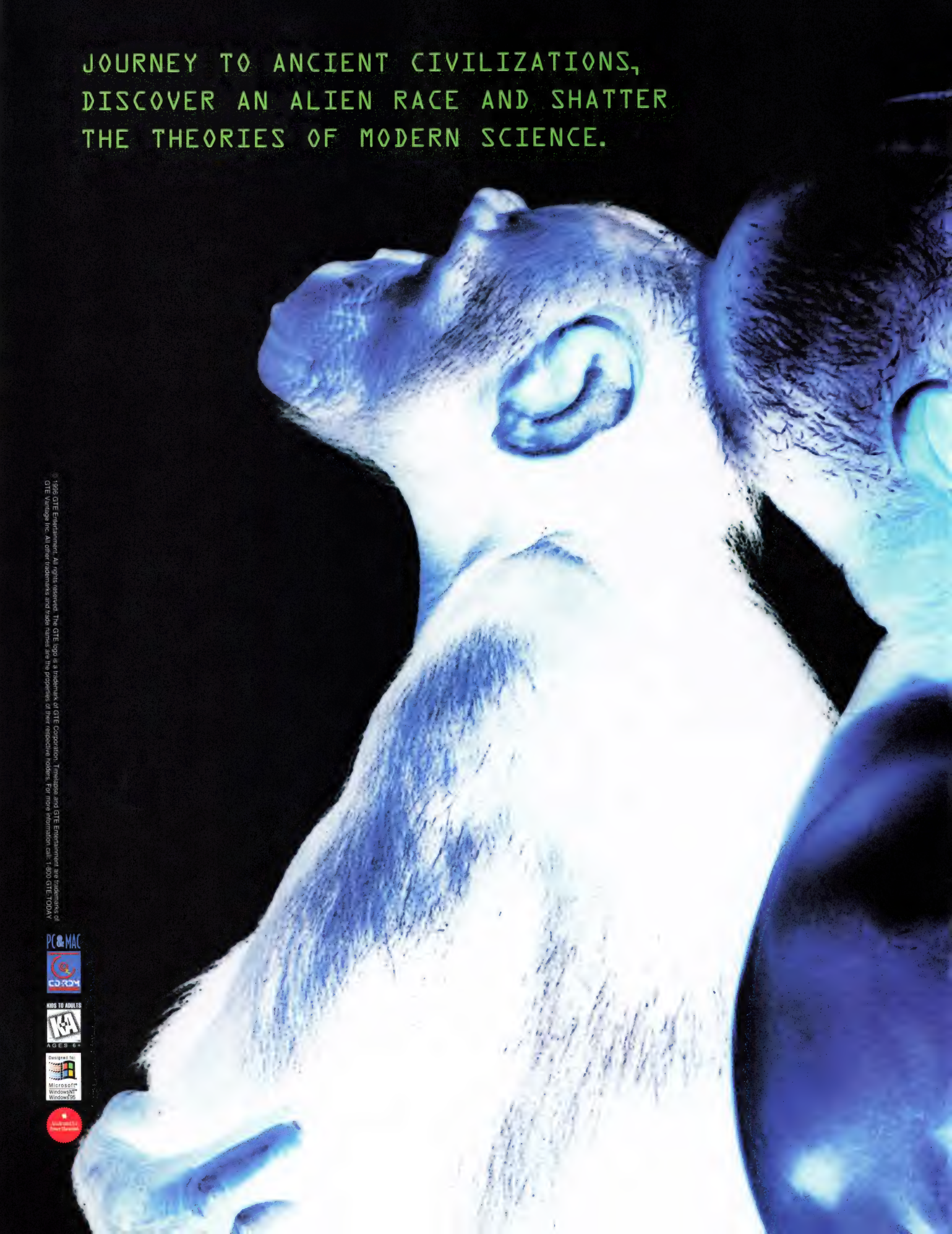

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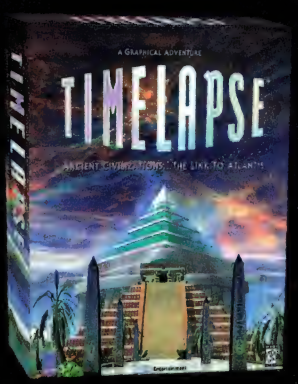

A Graphical Adventure

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Good fightin' fun for generals of all skill levels

Robert E. Lee: Civil War General

By Daniel Morris

War is funny: just when you think a breakthrough has been made, the tide turns right back in the other direction. Real-time strategy may look like it's on its way to overwhelming the wargaming market, but standout turn-based games such as Robert E. Lee: Civil War General prove there's still a lot of fight left in the genre.

Civil War General is a simple, classic wargame that grabs your attention right from the opening volley. There's nothing fancy at all about its design—hex-based movement, turns representing blocks of time, etc. But there's inspiration beneath the staid interface that's impossible to deny.

The game covers the campaign of Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia over seven scenarios, from the storied army's fledgling engagement at First Manassas to (if you keep winning) a fictional climactic assault on Washington, D.C. Already, the jaded neo-wargamer is alarmed—only seven scenarios! Well, these aren't the "10 minutes and I'm out" scenarios of modern hits. This is old-school, junk-food wargaming; each scenario is long, studious, and obsessively involving.

You play as either the North or South, beginning the campaign with an amateur army of green troops with spirit aplenty and no idea of the kind of carnage they're getting into. As history dictates, the opening engagements are wild, flailing affairs; as you progress through the scenarios, your army becomes battle-hardened and the war bogs down into a grueling meatgrinder, coalescing with the hell of Gettysburg (a scenario that will take a week for any competent general to complete).

Johnny Reb faces off against the Yanks at First Manassas.

Longstreet lays in ambush for a Union advance.

The complexity doesn't sacrifice anything to speed—the game moves quickly on a move-by-move, order-by-order basis. A simple, old-fashioned interface brings into consideration morale, fatigue, discipline, supply, and loyalty without any excessive work on your part.

In a nod to the market's trends, things are made as streamlined and straightforward as is humanly possible within the confines of the grand strategy genre. Supply is dynamic and painless, requiring only that you make decisions about allocating dwindling resources (and not worry about mundane things like where supply wagons are located).

This realism rewards good strategists in ways no real-time game can. As the South, you are numerically weaker but hardier and more flexible than those damn Yankees, and you're better able to use terrain as an advantage—both in facilitating your movement and in preparing for defense. As the North, you are challenged to focus your power in a unified attack and not squander your edge in strength. Strategies reward and punish: Maneuvering to cut off pockets of enemy troops pays off in mass surrenders and saves you casualties, but overextending leaves you vulnerable to counterattacks on your flank. Tactics reward and punish: Good hex-by-hex assessment of the situation will pay off in retention of key ground and positions, but bad assessment will force you to dislodge the enemy from easily defended positions. Risk-takers can send small bands of sharpshooters on stealthy hunts for enemy commanders.

If the preceding paragraph lulls you to sleep, you probably want to stay away from Civil War General. If it gets you going, then you've found your game—a detailed wargame that you don't have to micromanage.

You do have some interesting between-scenario options, like firing unit commanders if they're not up to snuff, upgrading rifles and cannons, and recuperating wounded leaders. (All the real historical commanders are present, even Abner Doubleday. Yep, the publisher.)

With multiplayer network/modem support and cool Super VGA graphics, Robert E. Lee: Civil War General is a wonderful old-school wargame. It's a rebel yell for turn-based historical gaming.

TIPS

• Force a retreat and overrun the enemy's position to scavenge supplies. • Keep your Corps Commanders mobile to boost morale, but don't let them stray into the front lines. • Let loose your artillery fire where it will do the most damage to enemy morale. Casualties should be a secondary consideration for artillery. • Upgrade your rifles to repeaters as soon as you've hoarded enough supply points. • Be sure to rest. Your front-line units need to be pulled back and rested every few hours or their morale and discipline will crumble.

GAMEPLAY:	A-	B+ OVERALL
GETTING STARTED:	B	
GRAPHICS:	B	
SOUND CHECK:	C	

Publisher: Sierra On-Line
800-757-7707
www.sierra.com
Developer: Impressions Software
Platform: Win 3.1/Win 95 CD
Requires: 486DX/33, 8MB RAM, Super VGA, mouse
List Price: $59.95

This old-style turn-based wargame shows there's still fight left in the genre.

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America's greatest conflict continues

Battleground 4: Shiloh

By Andrew Miller

Dust clouds choking lungs. Tired soldiers spurred on by trumpets and idealism. Charges that could end only one way: in death.

The Civil War was the real thing. It tore our country apart, leaving wounds that still fester. What warmonger could resist reliving our nation's bloodiest struggle yet again?

With the latest installment in its Battleground series, TalonSoft is giving gamers that chance. Happily, Battleground 4: Shiloh offers more features and multiplayer options than its Civil War predecessor, Battleground 2: Gettysburg. And Shiloh has all the ingredients that have made the Battleground series—Ardennes, Gettysburg, and Waterloo—so popular: an easy-to-use interface, excellent graphics, and historical accuracy. All the games' standard equipment can be found right here, with the same toolbar, menu options, and 2D and 3D displays.

Veterans of Battleground 2: Gettysburg should be able to move right into Shiloh with little or no difficulty, because the basic commands and options have remained the same. But you'll also find some new features that were introduced in Waterloo, like the ability to record and play back battles. Shiloh itself brings one major new weapon to the battlefield: head-to-head play via e-mail or modem ('bout time).

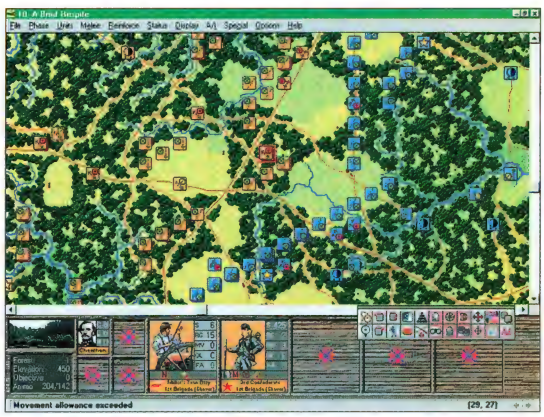
There are several ways to watch the action unfold. The close-up 3D perspective offers a detailed view of the Civil War's first major battle in the western theater. Unfortunately, the units are so big and detailed in this perspective that you can see only a small fraction of the battlefield at one time.

If you want to stay on top of things, use the normal 2D view. It's not as pleasing to the eye, but it's more practical. This perspective covers more ground and, if you're going to move a lot of units during a movement phase, it's easier to keep up with what's going on. That goes double for gathering intelligence on your opponent's movements.

You're the general—with a bird's-eye view of the action.

Shiloh's artificial intelligence has received a major overhaul. The computer opponent is no longer a pushover; it's much more aggressive, especially when playing as the Confederates.

TalonSoft has also added several what-if scenarios, conspicuously absent in Gettysburg. The best of these is the 78-turn "Hold on, Hold out," which allows the unorganized Confederate forces to attack the Union forces at Shiloh a day earlier, as planned in real life by Confederate commander Albert Sidney Johnston.



Shiloh's 2D mode ain't pretty, but it's practical.

Shiloh also includes the two other Western Theater confrontations—the battle of Wilson Creek (August 1861) and the battle of Prairie Grove (December 1862).

One of the drawbacks of the Battleground series' hex-grid format is that you lose the ebb-and-flow of the battle. Unlike other military sims, such as The Blue and Gray or Close Combat, you can't make tactical adjustments any time you feel the need. Because you can only move in certain phases and fire your weapons in others, the battles lose their continuity. And winning and losing an engagement involves so many variables—troop strength, terrain, fatigue, unit quality, etc.—that it's hard to keep track of them all.

Shiloh's soundtrack is only a little above average. The battlefield sounds are fine, but unlike Waterloo, which featured bagpipes and classical music, Shiloh has Bobby Horton singing the songs from the era and twanging a banjo. I'm sure Mr. Horton is a fine musician, but he got on my nerves. Thank goodness I was able to mute him and concentrate on the fighting.

The Shiloh disc also includes demos and patches for Gettysburg and Ardennes. Fans of the series can look forward to TalonSoft continuing the Civil War series with Battleground 5: Antietam this fall.

While not exactly groundbreaking, Shiloh's enhanced AI and multiplayer options make it a must-buy for Battleground vets and anyone interested in the Civil War.

GAMEPLAY:	B-
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	B+
SOUND CHECK:	C
OVERALL	B-

Developer: TalonSoft
Publisher: Empire Interactive
410-933-9191
www.empire.co.uk
Platform: Win 3.1/Win 95 CD
Requires: 486DX/33, 8MB RAM, VGA, double-speed CD-ROM drive
List Price: $44.95

TalonSoft boosts its solid wargame engine with multiplayer modes and improved AI. But it should lose the banjo player.

TIPS

• Put smaller units in front of your main line of troops to diminish the effectiveness of enemy fire. • Use the terrain to your advantage. Never attack an enemy that is on higher ground or in a forest: The defender always has the advantage. • You'll be more effective in the Melee phase if you've reserved some fresh troops. Have other units fire on an enemy unit in the Offensive Fire phase.

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Exile: Escape From the Pit

Time marches on: Game developers aim high, then higher, and inevitably grow away from their roots. It's up to little companies to remember, and to remind us that what was the apogee of computer gaming nearly a decade ago can still be fun.

So it is with Exile: Escape from the Pit, a hybrid Macintosh/Windows role-playing game very much in the style of Ultima IV and V. The top-down view, the square-by-square movement, the basic conversational gambits (the town guards who do little more than grunt) all hark to a simpler time.

GAMEPLAY:	B-
GETTING STARTED:	A-
GRAPHICS:	C
SOUND CHECK:	B-
OVERALL	B-

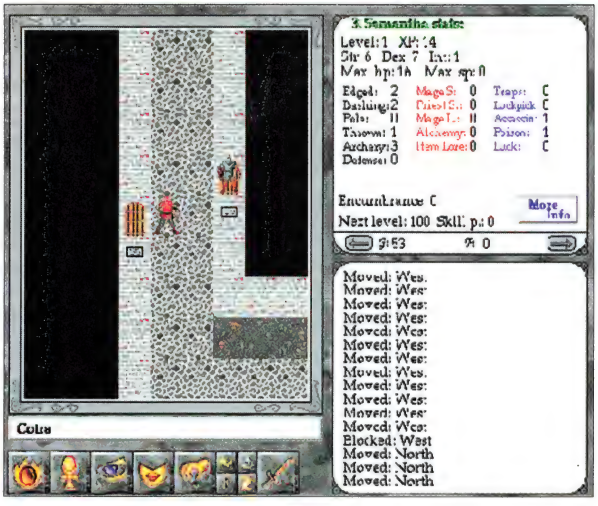
Developer: Spiderweb Software
Publisher: Fantasoft 608-242-5418
Platform: Win/Mac CD
Requires: Windows: 386, Win 3.1 or Win 95, 2MB RAM; Mac: 256-color QuickDraw, System 7.0, 2.5MB RAM
List Price: $34.95

Which is not to say that the game itself is simple. Your party of six has been exiled to the Underworld—the Empire's new-age method for dealing with misfits and dissidents. You'll have to learn the ways of this strange, sunless land, fight the good fight, and... well, ultimately, do as the title urges.

Exile offers an easygoing point-and-click interface; pleasant, if unambitious, graphics (slightly better on the Mac); a sweet classical score; literate prose; and a vast scope. The Pit is far larger than your early encounters will suggest—there are almost 80 towns and dungeons to visit—and Fantasoft reports that Exile should take 200 hours to complete.

Sure, it looks like an antique from the shareware world. But I can't bring myself to bash Exile for making me recall the weeks I spent lost in Ultima V, and you can't judge an RPG by its terrain alone. In fact, Exile does incorporate the odd modern feature, like the ability to record selected elements of your conversations, supply your own in-game music, summon an in-game world map, or use a time-saving "mass get" command.

On the other hand, I do question the wisdom of bundling even a demo character editor with the game. What's an RPG worth if players don't work to discover its secrets? They shouldn't be cheating. They should be exploring—and remembering. *—Peter Olafson*



The Sci-Fi Channel Trivia Game

Is there any genre that lends itself more to the trivial and arcane than science fiction? Not likely, which makes the Sci-Fi Channel Trivia Game a great idea on paper. And Byron Preiss Multimedia, the game's developer, would have a winner on its hands had it not made one crucial error: splicing in an intolerable shape-shifting alien "host" named Morphix.

As it is, your enjoyment of this title will depend entirely on your ability to filter out this incredibly annoying geek, who puts the worst, most insipid game-show host to shame. It's not as if you can avoid him: He sets up every question. But can you ignore him? If not, the inclination to fling your monitor out a seven-story window is going to be pretty strong (our advice: save the monitor, chuck the disc).

However, if you can tune Morphix out, you'll have a great time with the Sci-Fi Channel Trivia Game. The categories are logical: books, movies, television, comics, and the "wormhole" for miscellany. Over 4,000 questions run the appropriate gamut from fairly simple to extremely brain-taxing, even on the middle "quick" setting. Standard *Jeopardy!*-style scoring from 10 to 50 is in effect; a wrong answer loses you half the point value of the question. The fun will increase threefold if you cluster a few friends around to yell out some answers, and two players can compete directly–buzz in first and take a crack at a question.

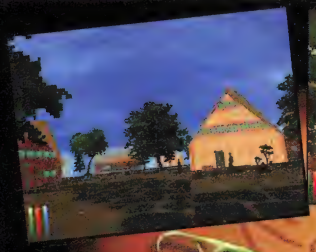
The disc also carries sign-up software for an Internet connection from national service provider EarthLink, with bookmarks to the Sci-Fi Channel's Dominion Web site (at **www.scifi.com**) as well as Byron Preiss's main Web site and its Virtual Comics site. In all, it's a fun, inexpensive little trivia package–just lose the alien, and everything would be fine.

–Donald St. John

GAMEPLAY:	B+
GETTING STARTED:	A-
GRAPHICS:	C
SOUND CHECK:	B
OVERALL	B+

Publisher: Byron Preiss Multimedia 800-945-3155 www.byronpreiss.com
Platform: Win 3.1/Win 95 CD
Requires: 486SX/33, 8MB RAM, Super VGA, double-speed CD-ROM drive, mouse, sound card
List Price: $19.95

It's a good game, but Morphix is every bit as much a weenie as he looks here.



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Editor-in-Chief,
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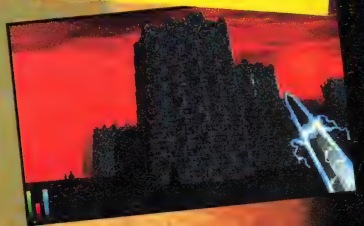

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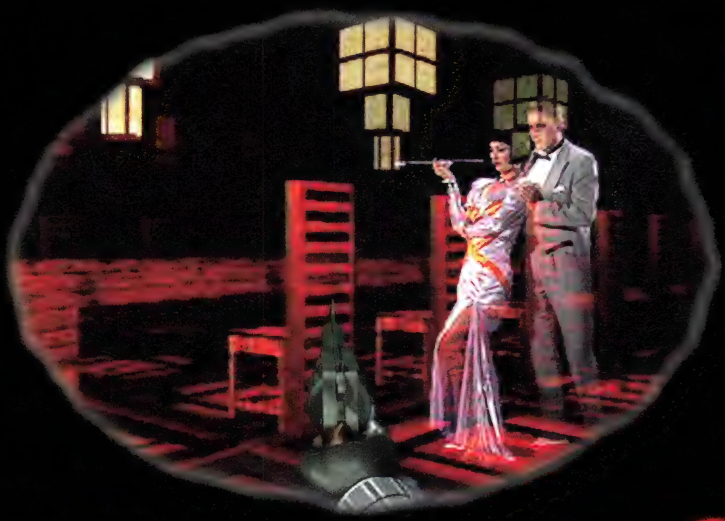

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Strategy & Tactics

How to kick some mechanized butt!

Z

By Shane Mooney

At first, you thought Z would be a piece of cake, but suddenly all those enemy robots started barreling down on you faster than you could down a can of rocket fuel. Now General Zod is chewing out your metallic butt and you're shaking in your tin boots. You need some good advice, or you're going to find yourself going home in a bucket.

Numbers are crucial when you're starting out. Build weaker units first, because they take less time to manufacture.

Practice Cautious Aggression

When you begin any mission, the first thing you'll want to do is try to capture half of all the available territories as quickly as possible, so your manufacturing speed can match your opponent's. Just be careful not to move into contested or enemy-held territories too early: You don't want to spread yourself so thin that you're not able to defend your territories. Always have some backup available, and consider placing units in positions where they can move quickly to reinforce several areas of the map.

The Right Tools For the Job

Survey the area quickly and note the position of uncaptured hardware and other goodies, then send the appropriate units to those territories. The key word here is "appropriate"; obviously, you wouldn't want to send a light tank to capture a flag that has a medium tank sitting next to it. Also, you need to remember that even though robots run toward flags and uncaptured hardware automatically, they won't fire back while they're doing it—making them easy targets for the enemy.

Don't get so concerned with what you're doing that you neglect to keep a watchful eye on what your opponent is up to with his resources. Check frequently, and be sure to move your forces to provide an adequate line of defense.

Generally speaking, you should send like units against like units, or you risk a quick and painful death.

Building Units

Once you've captured territories with factories, immediately specify what you want the factory to build. It's better to build cheaper units at a quicker pace initially and then up the output to more powerful units once you've had a chance to establish yourself. As units are manufactured, be sure to give them orders immediately. You don't want them hanging out with nothing to do but serve as target practice.

With some careful timing, enemy-held factories can also be good ambush sites. You can wipe out enemy units as they emerge from a factory by targeting the entrance a second or two before the unit emerges. It hardly sounds fair, but hey, who said war was fair?

On that note, remember that turnabout is fair play. If you see that you're about to lose a territory containing a factory, quickly downgrade the units

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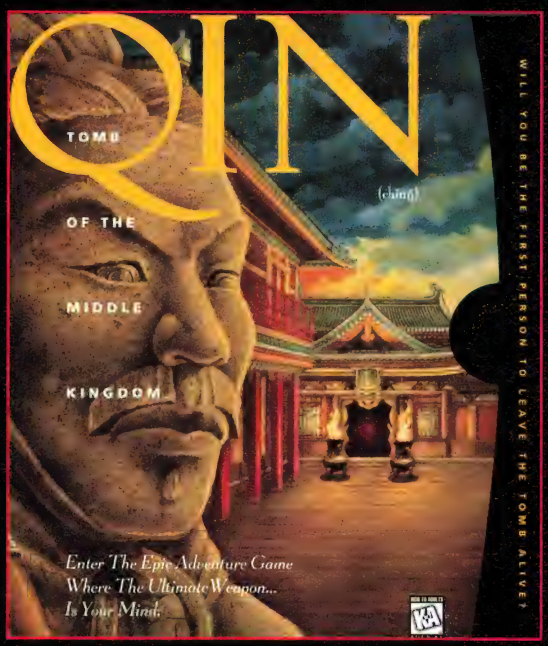

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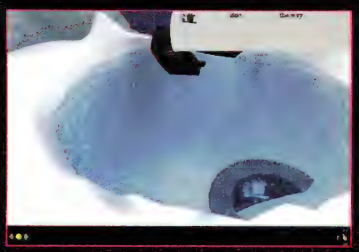

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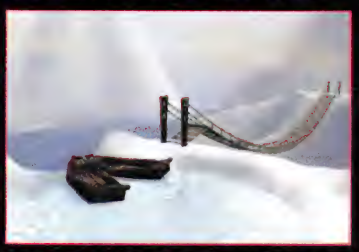

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After a hard day of kickin' ass, you might want to kick back with a can of brewski, er, rocket fuel.

Try to keep your units separated so one shot can't take 'em all out.

being manufactured to the weakest possible. That way, your opponent won't reap a huge benefit from the time you've spent manufacturing. Also, even if you can't take and hold a territory, at least try to capture the flag just before a factory can complete its manufacturing cycle.

Stack the Deck

Sending an additional unit into a firefight where like units are duking it out will definitely enhance your odds of winning—even if it's only a unit of Grunts with a medium tank to attack an opposing medium tank. The additional units will draw your opponent's fire or simply momentarily confuse him. If you do use this tactic, avoid letting your units get too close together, which can allow your opponent to wipe them out with one shot.

Practice some fancy mousework to perform pincer movements or set up a ring of units to surround the enemy. Speaking of fancy mousework, it's important that you learn how to use the right mouse button to scroll the screen or access the minimap so you can move around the battlefield as quickly as possible.

All Robots Aren't Created Equal

One thing that a lot of people don't realize is that different units move at different speeds, so don't automatically assume that grouped units will arrive at their destinations at the same time. You need to get a sense of timing down so that you can have different units arriving at the same target simultaneously, as they'll be much more effective than if they arrive one after another. Use a series of small movement orders to move units with precision. Also, try to keep your units on a road during combat so they can outmaneuver enemy fire more quickly—jeeps and light tanks on roads can often dodge grenades that are thrown at them.

Strength in Numbers

An effective way to beat enemy vehicles using foot soldiers is to attack with multiple units (especially Snipers) from different directions. That way, there's a greater chance of taking out the driver.

General Tips and Tactics

One tactic that you don't want to forget is the effective use of static lines in your defense. For example, you can defend a road by placing units on either side of it; the object is to turn enemy units into scrap in the crossfire as they move down the road.

When you target an opponent with a tank or gun, keep in mind that the turret is locked in place. Make sure your turret is pointing in the correct direction when you give the order to attack. This way, you'll have a much better chance of getting your shots off first when the combat starts. If you combine this technique with a rapid retreat, light tanks and medium tanks can be very effective against light guns.

Try to place artillery units in a good position to bombard the enemy fort without being in the range of the defending guns.

Tanks and guns can fire over buildings to take out robots with rifles or machine guns.

One sneaky trick to remember is that when a bridge is destroyed, the units unfortunate enough to be crossing it at the time are also destroyed. You may want to weaken bridges beforehand so that enemy units crossing them can be taken care of in one shot. ■

To maximize firing power, try to get your forces to arrive simultaneously.

Before an enemy unit has a chance to capture one of your factories, be sure to downgrade its output to the weakest unit possible.

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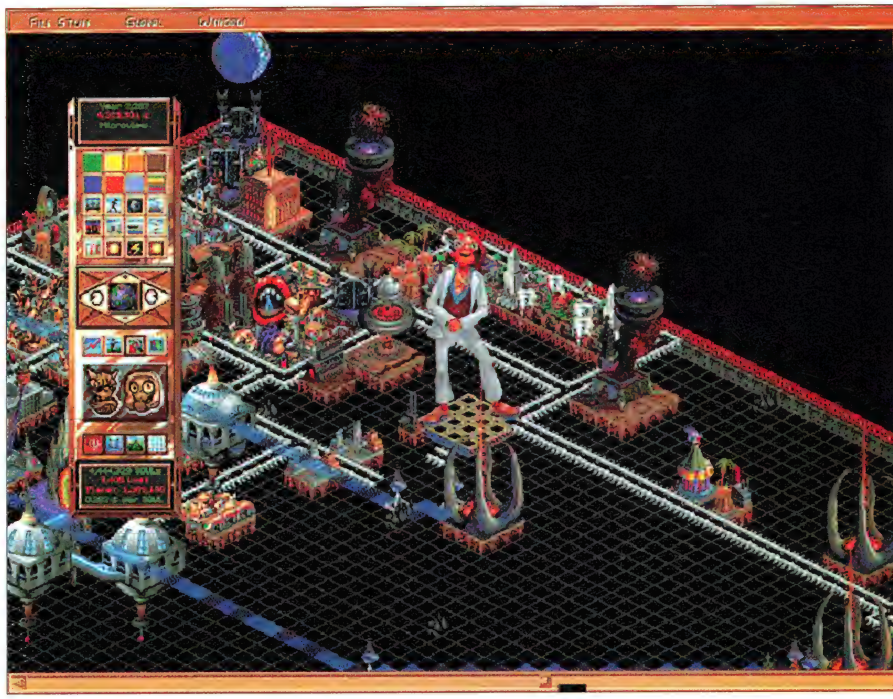
How to do well in Heaven and Hell

Afterlife

By Shane Mooney

So you want to play God, but you're finding that trying to run a profitable hereafter ain't so heavenly a task; in fact, it's rather hellish. Well, before you consider selling your soul to the devil for a way to successfully see your way through this ultimate God sim, check out the strategies below. Equipped with this knowledge, you'll have a devilishly good time with Afterlife.



Keep the Disco Demon at bay with the Crinkly Cacophony Contrivance.

Economics 101

Just like a baby, it's best to start out small and build up slowly. As you know, you're expected to show a certain predictable amount of population growth. If you don't achieve this average, your SOUL (Stuff of Unending Life) Rate is likely to drop dramatically.

Some think that it's a good idea to maximize your permanent population, because this will boost your SOUL Rate and yearly income. Unfortunately, this afterlife just isn't that simple. About halfway through the game, you'll see that you can only raise your SOUL Rate so far, and then there are all those awful Bad Things that are constantly plaguing your buildings. If all your structures are full of permanent residents and some of them are destroyed, there's nowhere for these residents to go. It's best to stick with a certain percentage of temporary residents and housing for just such an emergency.

It's All About Vibes

Vibes are the measurement of how structures in the Afterlife affect other structures. The most important thing to remember is that Vibes can either hinder or help the evolution of surrounding Fate structures, which grow from small buildings to large buildings. Naturally, the larger the building, the more SOULs it can accommodate, which in turn helps increase your population average and SOUL Rate (which in turn gets you more of those Pennies From Heaven). So, with that in mind, you want pro-evolutionary Vibes in both realms.

In Hell, good soul management brings you rewards like tentacles in boiling lava and slime-oozing snails.

When zoning in Heaven, go for three-by-three blocks of Fate Zoning. You want as many different types of rewards next to each other as possible.

Remember, though, that good Vibes are pro-evolutionary (a good thing) in Heaven, but anti-evolutionary (a bad thing) in Hell. For instance, Gates in both worlds are anti-evolutionary: In Heaven they give off bad Vibes, in Hell they give off good Vibes,

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Unlike other helicopter flight sims, Hind incorporates troop deployment, troop drops and pick-ups. There's even a multiplayer feature that allows for the ultimate mission: head-to-head combat with the Apache.

Just remember, once you get the enemy in your sites, lock in and fire when ready. You may not get another chance.

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but their effect on each respective population is the same.

Therefore, when you build Topias (housing for your angels and demons) or Special Buildings, you should consult the Real Estate Inventory to see the range of Vibes these buildings give off—that is, how many tiles in each direction they can influence things—and then place them accordingly.

When dealing with Fate structures, keep in mind that they're all over the map when it comes to Vibes—they could be really good or really bad. Given that their circle of influence is only one tile in any direction, it's not necessarily a big deal. If you're really anal-retentive, though, you can check out the Vibe values in the Real Estate Inventory and lock each tile when it reaches its maximum Vibe efficiency. Keep in mind that it's not a good idea to lock a tile at the lower levels of its potential capacity.

Bad Things

Even in Heaven, eternal bliss is not to be. There are a host of Bad Things bent on wreaking havoc on your little plot of paradise (or perdition, as the case may be). Thankfully, there are Special Buildings that you can use to help counteract the effects of those Bad Things. You get access to these through the Gift icon when you reach a certain landmark in the game. Try to place these buildings as centrally as you can, so they will protect as much of your Realm as possible, and exude those important pro-evolutionary Vibes. Here's a rundown of the Bad Things followed by the Special Buildings that can counteract them.

- **Birds Of Paradise:** The Vista Enhancement Doohickey protects an eight-tile radius.
- **Bats Out Of Hell:** The Ugliness Engine protects an eight-tile radius.
- **Heaven Gets The Blues:** The Audio Improving Embophone protects heavenly tiles for a nine-tile radius.
- **Disco Inferno:** The Crinkly Cacophony Contrivance protects your infernal tiles for a nine-tile radius.
- **Paradise Pair O' Dice:** The Fluffy Comfort Dispenser protects a 12-tile radius.
- **Hell Freezes Over:** The Tactile Degradation Gizmo protects a 12-tile radius.
- **Heaven Nose:** The Heaven Scent Atomizer protects a 10-tile radius.
- **Hell In A Handbasket:** The Creamy Candy Castle protects an 11-tile radius.

You can take a closer look at an individual SOUL. Find out his beliefs, or follow him around to see if he feels blessed or doomed.

When you're hit with a Bad Thing, the first thing you'll want to do is slow the game down to Divine Intervention to curtail any massive losses of SOULs. If Heaven has the Blues or Hell is Freezing Over, you need to check the status of your Gates. If everything was affected (including the Gates), you're in pretty good shape, as you simply have to wait for the Bad Thing to go away. If only part of your realm is affected, you'll want to lay down generic Zoning to cover the incoming population. You can always zap this new Zoning once your Bad Thing wears off and the realm returns to normal. Also, make sure that at least one functioning Karma Station is connected to the rest of the Zoning by a Road.

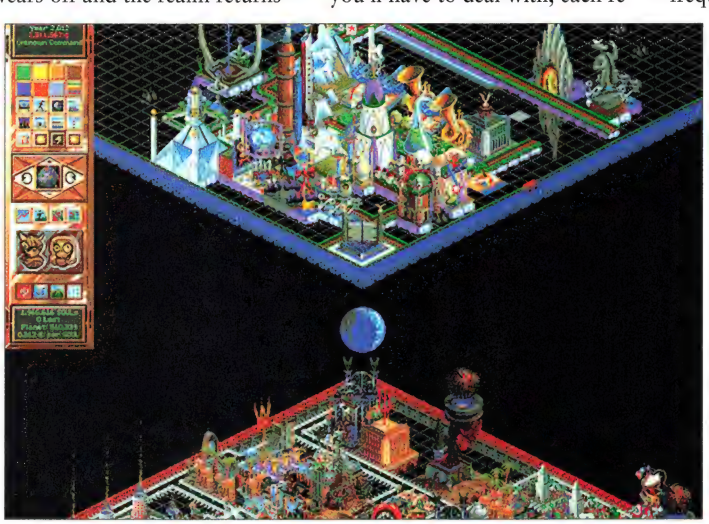
With the other Bad Things, you may want to just replace what's been destroyed with new Zoning. Keep in mind that Bat droppings from Bats Out Of Hell will actually increase the efficiency of your Punishments, but will decrease any other building's efficiency by one-half.

Growth Me Out

In the Afterlife, there are basically three stages of growth that you'll have to deal with, each requiring a slightly different strategy. In the first level, before you reach 5 million SOULs, you can be pretty loose in what you build, not worry too much about Bad Things, and not have to pay a lot of attention to finances.

The second stage, up to 200 million SOULs, is the hardest, and it's where you'll want to be the most conservative. Concentrate heavily on efficiency and your budget. Because of the high influx of SOULs, you'll want to lay down advance Zoning so your housing doesn't max out quickly. Consult Jasper and Aria frequently, and don't overzone or build large Topias or Training Centers.

After 200 million SOULs, you should have enough money to relax a little and just let things go naturally. You can afford to lose a few SOULs and should feel free to experiment with Limbo Structures. Once you reach a billion SOULs, you'll be awarded Omnibolges and Love Domes, and you essentially start the whole process of building up your realms all over again. Ah, the work of a Demiurge is never done.



As if one otherworldly realm wasn't enough, in Afterlife you have two to deal with. You'll soon see that what does one thing in Heaven does just the opposite in Hell.

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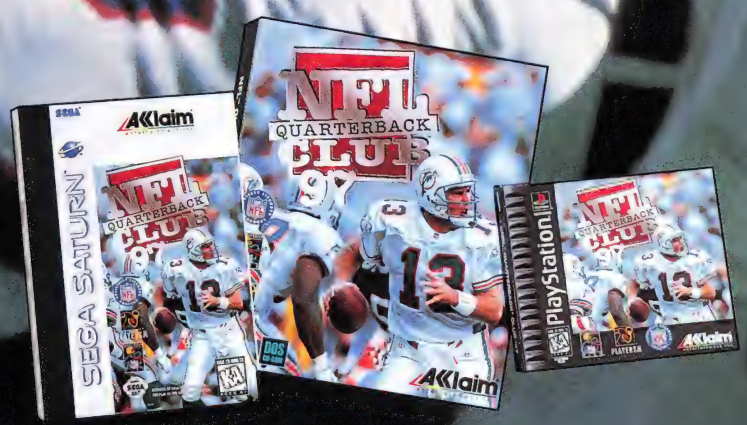

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Here they are—the cheats to some of your favorite older games. The ones you just couldn't let go of until you found the secrets you knew existed. Hey, we understand—we couldn't rest either till we'd broken the backs of these great titles. Now you can enjoy the unrivaled pleasure of extra lives, invulnerability, and all the other things that give gamers glee. Next month, we'll complete our tribute with a few more classic codes—plus more cheats for the newest, hottest games.

Duke Nukem 3D

Enter these at any time.

DNCORNHOLIO: God mode (and unlimited jetpack).

DNKROZ: Same as CORNHOLIO.

DNVIEW: Third-person view (same as hitting the F7 key).

DNHYPER: Steroids mode.

DNITEMS: Gives all inventory items and keys.

DNWEAPONS: Gives all weapons and ammo.

DNKEYS: Gives all the keys.

DNSTUFF: Gives all weapons, keys, and inventory items.

DNSCOTTYxy: Level warp, where "x" is the single-digit Episode Number and "y" is the two-digit level number (e.g., 02, 03).

DNSKILLx: Changes the difficulty mode ("x" can be 0 to 3).

DNUNLOCK: Opens all doors and unlocks all locked doors.

DNMONSTERS: Turns monsters on/off.

DNCLIP: Lets you walk through walls.

DNSHOWMAP: Shows the entire map.

DNCASHMAN: Spews money when you press spacebar.

DNCOORDS: Shows extremely detailed map coordinate/level information.

DNDEBUG: Shows some debug information.

DNRATE: Shows your frame rate onscreen. You must be in full-screen mode for the figure to be anywhere near accurate.

DNBETA: Prints the message "Pirates Suck!"

DNALLEN: Prints the message "Buy Major Stryker"

DNTODD: Prints the message "Register Cosmo Today!"

Note: Being in God mode can crash the game at certain points, as when you're squashed by gears. Also, DNCLIP can cause crashes at any time; you may have to restart your computer after using it.

Duke Nukem 3D

Rise of The Triad

Enter these codes at any time during gameplay.

DIPSTICK: Enable/disable cheat codes.

GOTO: Go to another level.

GOOBERS: Restart current level.

REEN: Re-enter level.

GOGATES: Exit to DOS.

GOARCH: Exit current level.

MAESTRO: Game jukebox.

CHOJIN: Woundless with weapons.

TOOSAD: God mode (temporary invulnerability).

WOOF: Dog mode (temporary invulnerability).

FLYBOY: Mercury mode (flying).

BADTRIP: Shrooms mode.

BOING: Elasto mode (bounce; no friction).

SPEED: Enable autorun.

PANIC: Reset to normal; full health; no modes, keys, or extra guns.

WHACK: Hurt yourself.

86ME: Kill yourself.

DIMON: Light diminishing on.

DIMOFF: Light diminishing off.

LONDON: Fog on.

NODNOL: Fog off.

GOTA386: Turn off floor and ceiling textures.

GOTA486 : Turn on floor and ceiling textures

Rise of the Triad

SHINEON: Light sourcing on.

SHINEOFF: Light sourcing off.

SHOOTME: Bulletproof armor.

BURNME: Asbestos armor.

LUNGDUNG: Gas mask.

SIXTOYS: Get items (keys, bullet-proof armor, health).

SLACKER: Get all keys required to finish the level.

HUNTPACK: Outfit player (bullet-proof armor, keys, heatseeker, and a split missile).

JOHNWOO: Double pistols.

VANILLA: Bazooka.

HOTTIMES: Heatseeker.

BOOZE: Drunk missile.

FIREBOMB: Firebomb.

SEEYA: Hand of god (permanent god mode).

SPLIT: Split missile.

KESOFDEATH: Kinetic energy sphere.

CUJO: Missile camera on/off.

WHERE: Toggles coordinate display on/off.

CARTIER: Shows entire map (but does not work from the map).

CHEATS

continued on page 164

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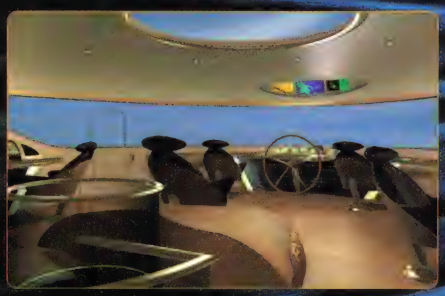

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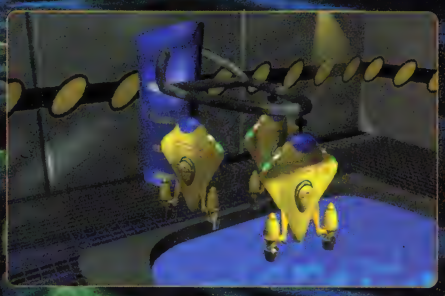

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continued from page 162

MissionForce: Cyberstorm

The following codes are activated by adding a line to the CSTORM.INI file located in the MissionForce: Cyberstorm directory. (Be sure to back up your original first.) The addition will cause a new menu item to appear. Using this approach, the codes only need to be entered once, and you can use them repeatedly. You can use any text editor, such as Notepad, Wordpad, or a word-processing program.

Here's how to do it:

1. Run your text editor.
2. Load CSTORM.INI from the Cyberstorm directory. You might want to back up this file before continuing.
3. Pick a code from the list below.
4. Type the code on a line by itself somewhere in the file, making sure you spell it correctly. (Don't worry about capitalization.)
5. Repeat steps 3 and 4 until done.
6. Save the text file as CSTORM.INI, replacing the original file.
7. Run Cyberstorm and you'll have new menu options available at certain times.

(Note: These codes are useful only for the single-player career. You won't be able to use them during a multiplayer/hotseat battle.)

Optional Features

Code: 2112

Available: on HercBase screen

Note: requires version 1.1

Function: Entering this code adds two items to the menu bar. The first lets you repair all your HERCs and bioderms quickly, while the other lets you autolink any pilots you forgot. Both codes are useful in a rush.

Code: I changed my mind

Available: on HercBase screen

Note: requires version 1.1

Function: Entering this code adds three items to the menu bar that let you change the difficulty level on the fly. Switching difficulty will affect the currently loaded career, and the changes will remain in effect until changed again through the menu.

Credits

Code: I'll Buy That for a Credit

Available: on HercBase screen

Function: Get a single credit, for the extreme penny pinchers

Code: For a Few Credits More

Available: on HercBase screen

Function: Get 1,000 credits

Career Options

Code: Heal Me

Available: on HercBase screen

Function: Repairs all HERCs and pilots

Code: I Don't Like Those

Available: on HercBase screen

Function: Get new missions

MissionForce

NCAA Championship Basketball

Code: BrownNoser

Available: on HercBase screen

Function: Jump to the next rank

Current Combat Unit

Code: I Am Whole Again

Available: on main combat screen

Function: Heal current pilot

Code: Look Into My Eyes

Available: on main combat screen

Function: Edit pilot data

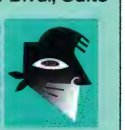
NCAA Championship Basketball

Outcoach your rivals with on-the-fly play calling! Hit F4 to do a clear-out play so your star player can drive to the hoop. Hit F5 to call a pick or screen play (depending on your position on the court).

If you want to know which teams are going to dominate over the next year or so, look in the Credits area at the principal people involved in making the game. Whatever team's logo is in the background is a team destined to be a force in college hoops.

This last one's not really a cheat, but it's a good tip: If you're having problems making shots from the charity stripe, don't shoot! If you wait long enough (about 70 dribbles), the player will automatically take—and almost always make—the free throw.

Is a certain game driving you nuts? Can't figure out how to kill an enemy, solve a puzzle, or find a key? We can help! Send your cheat code requests to *PC Games*, Attn: Strategy & Tactics, 951 Mariner's Island Blvd., Suite 700, San Mateo, CA 94404; fax: 415-349-7482; e-mail: ccohen @iftw.com.



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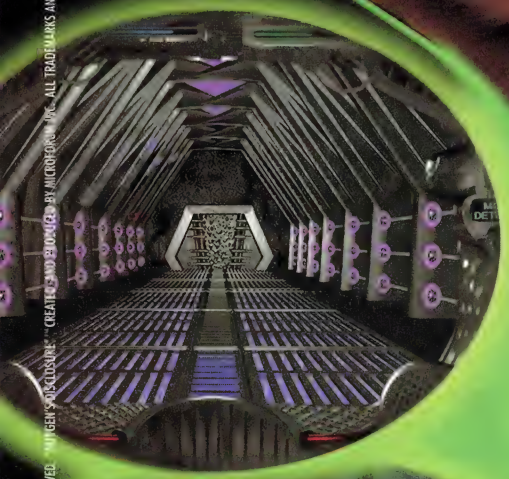

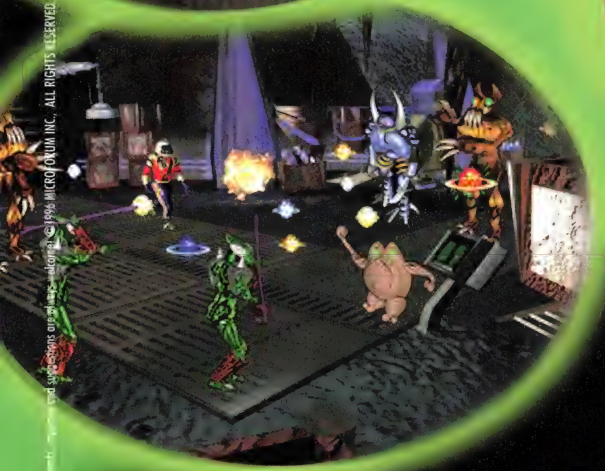

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By J. Daniel Jones

Power Up!

It's the online battle of a lifetime, and it's finally going your way. Fusion pistols blazing, you've crossed the portal of no return. Basically, it's now or never—and for once, it's gonna be now!

"More power!" you shout to no one in particular (in cyberspace, no one can hear you scream). Miraculously, you're granted your wish by the previously ignored ragings of Mother Nature herself. The storm outside unleashes an energy blast of its own as lightning strikes a communication transference structure ("telephone pole" to you and me).

Of course, you've protected your bleeding-edge gaming platform. You've got everything plugged into a series of "surge protector" power strips that you picked up at the local discount warehouse. So why is there the unmistakable aroma of "eau de circuitry fricassee"?

Well, the culprit is those little copper cables that you routinely curse for keeping your bandwidth appetite on a diet. Congratulations: Your telephone line was just the recipient of a free dose of Mother Nature's love, in the form of a searing blast of megavolts. In short, you've been fried in real time—and for all time. It looks like that fancy $60 surge protector, the one with the built-in modem line protection, the one that you passed up, doesn't look so expensive now. Not that you need one...anymore.

Your personal computer, and all its various accoutrements, is very likely to be the most expensive toy in your household. It's also likely to be the most sensitive in terms of power consumption. To understand how to protect your precious investment, let's first take a look at exactly what happens when you flip the power switch.

From the Beginning

PCs operate on DC (direct current), such as that supplied by your car battery. But what's coming out of your wall socket is AC (alternating current). Obviously, there's a small problem here. That's where your computer's power supply comes in: Its main job is to take this alternating current and convert it into direct current.

The power supply inside your computer is most happy when it receives AC that's running at a precise 110 volts with a perfect "sine wave" (which represents a smooth and steady 60-cycle alternation between voltage and absence of voltage) and at a steady 15 amps. Whether or not your wall socket provides this ideal AC is determined by a whole bunch of factors, including where you live, what room you've got your computer in, and how old your dwelling is. Regardless, even assuming the best possible combination of the above factors, your computer is subjected to power fluctuations on a daily basis, more or less.

The circuits inside the power supply attempt to clean up, clamp down, and boost the fluctuating current to acceptable levels. Problem is, your computer's power supply may not be up to the task. In these days of tight profit margins and incredible computer bargains, power-supply construction is a "transparent" area where manufacturers can save quite a bit of money. That's why, at the very least, you should provide your own protection in the form of surge protectors, line conditioners, and uninterruptable power supplies (UPS's).

Ups and Downs

The fluctuating AC current can cause either too much or too little power to come through your computer. In an "over-voltage" situation, your computer is subjected to either "surges" or "spikes." A surge is a relatively long period of over-voltage—relatively, because even a thousandth of a second can be a very long time indeed when dealing with electrical power. A spike, meanwhile, is a very brief period of over-voltage that is usually much stronger than a surge.

At the opposite end of the power-problem spectrum are "sags," or under-voltage. These are actually more common and are potentially more damaging than a surge or spike. Sags in the voltage, also known as "brownouts," can be caused by such things as the power company switching grids, generally high power consumption on a hot summer day, or somebody flipping on a jammed-up garbage disposal out in the kitchen. Whatever the cause, once the voltage drops below a certain point, the computer's power supply is no longer getting that perfect sine wave. If the power drops too low, your power supply will eventually shut itself off. Unfortunately, this may well be past the time that your hard drive's data is garbled beyond all recognition.

While surges, spikes, and sags are certainly hazards to your computer's health, perhaps the biggest power problem for computer owners is not under- or over-voltage, but "noisy" power. Noisy power refers to harmonic distortions in AC power that can actually cause little microblips that your computer may mistakenly interpret as data. When that happens, your hard drive will most likely get scrambled. And this is one case where having the latest and the greatest PC can actually be a liability: The faster your computer, the more susceptible it is to line noise.

ILLUSTRATION BY STEVEN W. FLEURY

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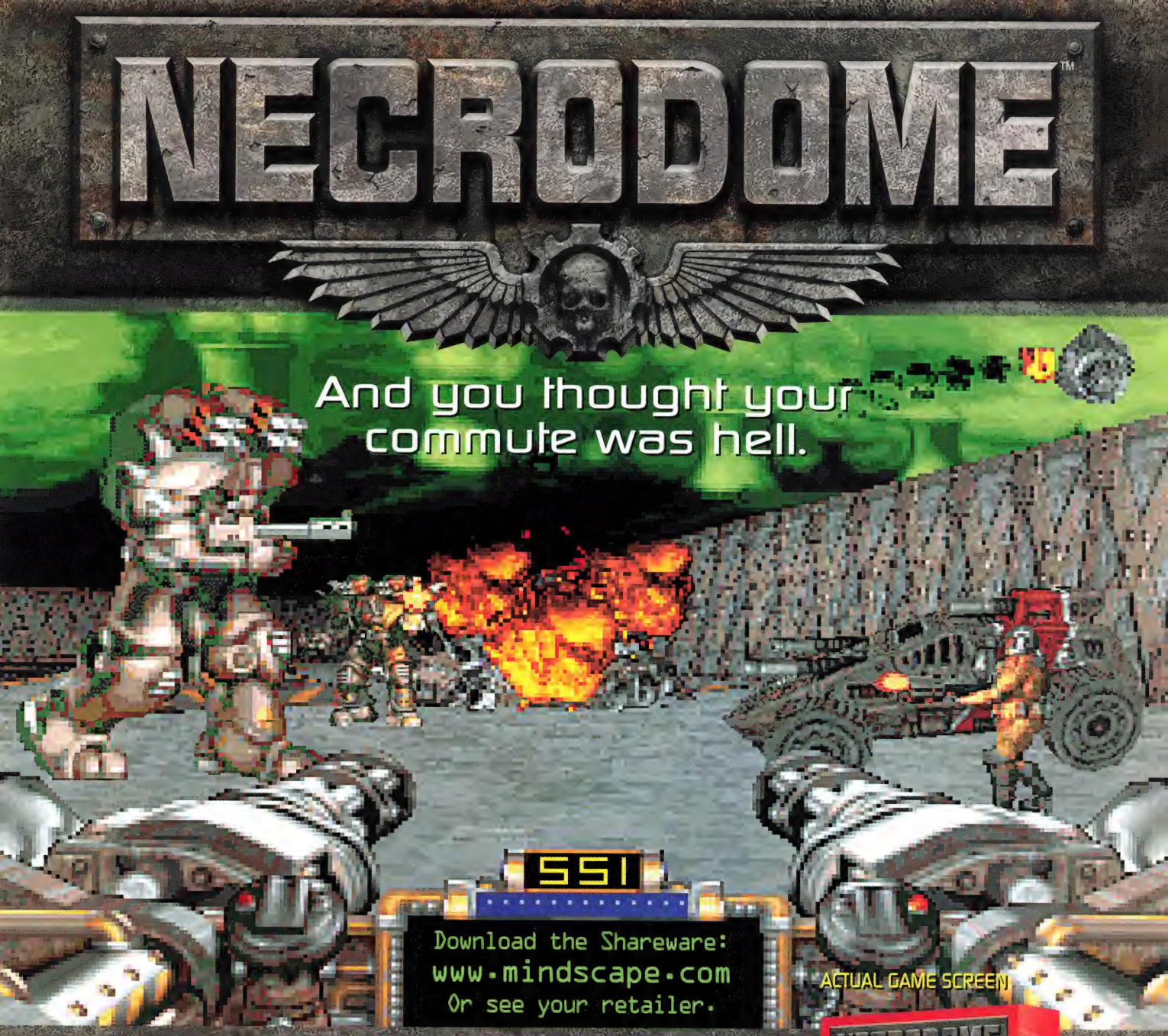

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The Urge to Surge

So, how can you cope with these electrical ups and downs? First, get a good surge protector. These come in all shapes, sizes, capabilities—and prices. They range from the ubiquitous injection-molded power strip to massive wall-mount units and cost from as little as about $5 to almost $100. Top-of-the-line models often double as "power centers," allowing you to turn on your devices one at a time or all at once via a master switch. Naturally, there are a number of things to look for when shopping for this essential computer peripheral.

First of all, at the very minimum, you need a device that meets the Underwriters Laboratories (UL) specification 1449 standard for transient voltage surge suppression (TVSS), category "B." Keep in mind that the phrase "tested to meet" or "exceeds" does not mean that it is "listed" (tested and approved) by Underwriters Laboratories. When in doubt, look for the UL seal.

Next, you need to determine how quick you want the surge protector to be, and how much power it can withstand before it explodes (literally). This translates into how much joule protection the surge protector has. Here, bigger is better: Joule protection can range from less than a couple of hundred for "el cheapo" power strips to 1600 joule protection for top-of-the-line "multi-stage" devices.

The other thing you need to keep in mind when shopping for a surge protector is what type of Metal Oxide Varistor (MOV) it uses. The better the MOV, the faster the device can sense over-voltage and increase its resistance to counter the current. A damaging spike will often be much faster than the response times of some of the slower (read: cheaper) MOV-based protectors, so these will allow spikes to blast past them virtually unchecked.

You could, of course, opt for a top-of-the-line, multi-stage protection surge protector that can actually absorb a direct lightning hit and still protect your computer. That is, if you've got hundreds of dollars to spend. These high-end devices are typically used to protect sensitive installations such as U.S. Navy shipboard computer systems and computer-based retail cash/inventory management systems.

Of course, no matter how good a surge protector you spring for, you've still got only a passive device. If the power goes out, it can't help you, and your computer will come to a screeching—and potentially damaging—halt. That's where an uninterruptable power supply (UPS) comes into play.

Active Protection

A UPS is basically an AC power supply with a battery back-up. In the more inexpensive models, a voltage-sensing device monitors the current passing through the UPS on its way to your computer. When the voltage drops below a specified amount, the UPS will switch over to the battery, which pumps out enough power to keep your computer going. Still, your computer could suffer some garbled data because there is a little "blip" in the process when the machine is without power.

The amount of juice a UPS provides varies, and is measured in watts/amp. The more watts/amp you want, the more you should expect to pay. A lower-end 200-watt/amp will cost about $100, while a 400-watt/amp will put you closer to $200.

How long the UPS keeps your computer running depends on how big the battery is. Also, the more items that are plugged into the UPS when the power goes out, the shorter the time it will keep them all up and running. For example, my 600-watt/amp UPS kept my computer setup operating for more than 45 minutes in a recent power outage we had in San Diego.

Although virtually all UPS units come with pretty good surge protection built in, the higher-end UPS models also incorporate "line conditioning" into their circuitry. These units will cost you about an extra $50. Line conditioning actually senses both over- and under-voltage and uses regulators to boost and decrease the incoming voltage to precise tolerances. By doing this, it avoids having to switch over to battery power as often.

The most sophisticated type of UPS doesn't actually allow the wall current anywhere near your computer. Instead, it uses the incoming AC solely to keep the onboard battery charged. The battery is then constantly feeding the voltage regulator and converter to provide the ultimate in steady, consistent, and clean power. Expect to pay more than a thousand dollars if you're interested in this type of heavy-duty protection.

Bad Connections

So, if one surge protector or UPS is good, two or three must be better, right? Nope. Don't fall into the trap of buying a three-pack of power strips with surge protection and plugging them into each other, with the computer in the last strip. In general, the more devices that are plugged into this series of strips, the larger the current draw, and the more susceptible it is to current fluctuations—particularly sags.

It's also a no-no to mix a surge protector with a UPS—especially a cheap one. A UPS without line conditioning often produces what is called a "stepped approximation" of the incoming sine wave. While these steps are within the power-input tolerances of the computers themselves, power strips aren't normally expecting this stepped approximation. ■

What Do You Really Need?

Ultimately, what type of power protection you need depends upon where you live and how you use your computer. If, for example, you hail from Florida, you need all the protection you can afford, as the sunshine state is one of the more lightning-prone areas in the country. If you reside in Southern California, your requirements in the surge protection area are far more modest. Heck, it barely rains there, much less has thunderstorms. Brownouts are, however, a very common occurrence.

If your computer is only on when you're firmly planted in front of it, playing games, then a quality surge-protection device with a 450-joule rating should be sufficient. Expect to pay somewhere in the $25-to-$50 range. If you use your computer for a lot of unattended work, such as serving as your telephone/answering machine and fax, or rendering 3D artwork, then a UPS is a virtual necessity. A 400-watt/amp model should run in the neighborhood of $200.

And don't forget to protect your computer's "back door"—the modem and network connections. While it is rare for them to be subjected to a power surge, when it does happen, it will more than likely be big enough to damage both the device and your computer. You'll need to buy an additional stand-alone unit for about $25, which will protect both connections.

One last word of warning: Just as a spark can jump from your finger to a doorknob via static electricity, a huge and fast electrical spike (like one from a direct lightning strike) can easily jump the contacts of your computer's on/off switch. When Mother Nature is raging all around you and you want to be truly safe, pull the plug on your computer. —JDJ

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TEEN T AGES 13+ CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

By David Gerding

Infinite Storage—
Iomega and SyQuest Reinvent the Floppy

There was a time when floppy disks were the beginning and the end in storage. You'd have a diskette for the word processor program itself and another disk for the documents it produced. Next to your computer sat a drawer full of floppies, sometimes hundreds of the things. Ah, yes, life was simple. And slow. And annoying.

Hard drives changed all that. Faster and bigger, hard drives have replaced their floppy ancestors. Iomega and SyQuest are reinventing the floppy drive, combining the floppy's strengths of portability, low cost, and "swapability" with the storage sizes and speeds of hard drives. Unlike tape backup systems, which are slow but can store hundreds of megabytes of data, portable storage systems are meant for "real-time" use. Not only can you store your data on them, but you can also run games and apps *from them*. The era of portable, extendable storage has returned.

Gamer's Paradise

Why should you consider a portable storage drive? Surprisingly, gamers can use these drives even more effectively than the business crowd for which they were originally designed. Unlike business types, gamers switch "applications" all the time. Games today average 50MB for a "normal" install; some games require more than 150MB of space for a full installation. With portable storage, you can archive game installations and saved games, then "swap" them when you want to play something else. It gives you the option of putting a game away for a while without reinstalling—and you get to reclaim that precious hard drive space. We don't have to tell you the value of that.

Archiving

Archiving works like this: You install the game normally to your hard drive. When you want to play something else, you move (not copy) the entire installation directory to your portable storage disk. You can then install the next game to your hard drive. When you want to play the older game, move the newer game to a portable (even the same one if it's big enough), and then copy the "image" of your old game back to your hard drive.

Here's another trick. Want more save-game slots than Quake allows? Copy the ones you want to a directory on your portable disk. You can have different directories of saved games for every level. Simply copy these in and out of the folder of saved games in your Quake directory. Quake will never know the difference, and you'll be able to revisit those levels ad infinitum.

An even cooler trick is "running portable." If the installed game is smaller than the storage capacity of your portable drive, you can install the game directly to a portable disk and run the game directly from it. If your friend has a compatible drive system, you can bring your portable disk over to his house for an afternoon of gameplay without breaking the law, because you've only installed the game once. With an external drive, you can take not only the cartridge, but the drive itself over to your friend's place and hook it up to his machine.

Buying Drives: Caveat Emptor

Not every portable drive is ideal for running portable games. The big issues are speed and storage capacity. To run games effectively, the medium needs to have roughly 12ms (or less) seek time. In other words, it needs to be as fast as a typical IDE hard drive. The Zip drive (see below) uses pretty standard floppy disk technology combined with optical technology to more accurately place and read data from the disk. The downside is that this "magneto-optical" solution is slow; it also can't store as much as hard drive technology can. Thus, while magneto-optical is fine for most archive uses, it's often too slow for running games, or the games are simply too big.

Iomega's Jaz drive and SyQuest's ezflyer are essentially removable hard drives. The drive motor and mechanisms stay in the drive unit, and you insert hard-drive platters, which are conveniently encased in large plasterlike floppy disks. Their seek times are good for running games.

The last important consideration when thinking about portable drives is the type of connection or interface you will use to attach the drive to your system. All of the units reviewed here except the Jaz are available in either parallel port or SCSI versions. We recommend the SCSI versions, because parallel port versions can be more than *twice as slow* as their SCSI counterparts (which, of course, defeats the whole purpose when you're playing games). Unfortunately, if your system doesn't have a built-in SCSI adapter, you'll spend anywhere from $100 for a basic board to $200 or more for an advanced one, above and beyond the cost of the portable drive itself.

The Reviews

We looked at three "portable storage" solutions: Iomega's Zip drive, SyQuest's ezflyer 230, and Iomega's Jaz drive.

We only evaluated external, SCSI versions of the drives. The Zip and Jaz are also available as internal units if you want to save desk space. Each drive reviewed included one reusable disk. Finally, each of these drives was tested on a Windows 95 machine but will work with Windows 3.1 and Macintosh systems.

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"Simply awesome."
Coming Soon Magazine

"4 schwings out of 5."
Gadget Guru Online

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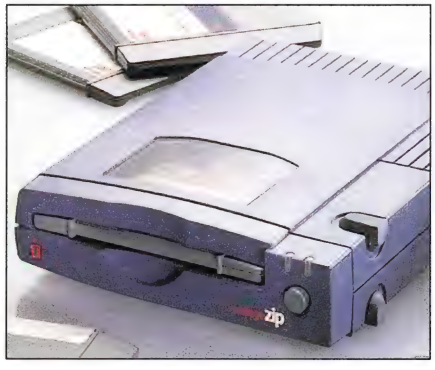
Zip

Iomega
800-697-8833
www.iomega.com
Price: $199
Interface: SCSI/Parallel
Storage Capacity: 100MB
Price Per Cartridge: $20
Price Per Megabyte: $0.20
Avg. Seek Time (ms): 29
Transfer Rate (max): 1.4MB/second
Transfer Rate (min): .79MB/second



The Zip drive features a sleek, contemporary look that makes it a handsome accessory to the power gamer's desktop. Each Zip disk is roughly the size of two floppy disks glued together, stores 100MB of uncompressed data, can be dropped on a corner from a height of eight feet without being damaged, and has a shelf-life of 10 years.

If your primary goals are to store games and saved-game files for later play and to use the drive to back up other programs and data, the Zip offers a lot for the money. If your primary goal is to play games directly from the disk, you'll run into a few problems, since the Zip has a relatively slow 29ms seek time. For example, we were able to successfully run Quake from the Zip disk, but there were much longer startup times compared to the hard drive, delays between levels, and longer game saves and loads. During gameplay, however, the drive was rarely accessed, meaning gameplay was essentially identical.

Another drawback is that with many games already exceeding 100MB, the time when games regularly exceed Zip's storage capacity may come sooner than you think.

While less expensive up front, at 20 cents per meg, Zip disks are relatively expensive compared to solutions like the ezflyer and the Jaz drive. Iomega has licensed the media format to other vendors, so it's likely that prices of disks will fall pretty quickly. They've also signed OEM deals with such PC-makers as Acer, Hewlett-Packard, NEC, and IBM to include the drives in upcoming systems. While Zip may not be the best portable drive from which to play games directly, it's the format most likely to supplant the floppy disk altogether in the next few years. (Amen to that.)

ezflyer 230

SyQuest
800-245-2278
www.syquest.com
Price: $289
Interface: SCSI or Parallel
Storage Capacity: 230
Price Per Cartridge: $30
Price Per Megabyte: $0.13
Avg. Seek Time (ms): 13.5
Transfer Rate (max): 2.4MB/second
Transfer Rate (min): 1.4MB/second

The ezflyer 230 is SyQuest's answer to the Zip drive. SyQuest was caught off guard by Iomega's success with the Zip and Jaz and is playing catch-up with the 230. They've done an admirable job, more than doubling the storage capacity and speed of the Zip without doubling the price. If you are considering Zip technology, give the ezflyer 230 serious consideration.

Slightly wider than the Zip unit, and sporting a battleship-gray exterior, the ezflyer 230 is more conservative in appearance than the Zip or Jaz. The cartridge is also more utilitarian in appearance. But in performance, it delivers 230MB of uncompressed storage at hard-drive speeds. SyQuest claims its disks have a 20-year shelf-life and can be dropped from "eye level" without damage.

The disk bundled with the drive contains some free software, including a rather addictive puzzle game called Triazzle Light. The ezflyer will read and write older EZ 135 disks as well. We'd say ezflyer is the right choice when you want to play games and other apps direct from disk but don't want to spend $500 on a Jaz.

Jaz

Iomega
800-697-8833
www.iomega.com
Price: $499
Interface: SCSI only
Storage Capacity: 1GB
Price Per Cartridge: $99
Price Per Megabyte: $10
Seek Time (ms): 12
Transfer Rate (max): 6.73MB/second
Transfer Rate (min): 3.53MB/second

Until the very recent arrival of SyQuest's SyJet (see below), Jaz stood alone as the Rolls Royce of portable storage. This cool-looking unit stacks perfectly with a Zip drive if you have one, and the even cooler Jaz disks hold 1 *gigabyte* of data safely for 10 years. It's storage nirvana.

Once inserted, Jaz disks behave just like hard drives. None of the games or apps we test behaved noticeably different when installed on a Jaz drive versus installation on a normal hard drive. These disks really are cheap, swappable hard drives.

At a hundred bucks a pop, Jaz disks cost less per megabyte, but it may not *feel* like less at the checkout counter. Also, be warned that Jaz disks are more fragile than either Zip or ezflyer disks, only capable of enduring drops from 3 feet or less. If you've got the cash, the Jaz is one investment that is likely to make all of your computer time—not just games—a more enjoyable experience.

SyQuest SyJet

In late October, SyQuest shipped the SyJet, its 1.3GB answer to the Jaz. We were unable to get a review unit in time for this article. Pricing should be identical to the Jaz, and SyQuest promises that the SyJet delivers better performance. We'll take a look at the SyJet in a future issue.

Next issue, we'll continue our coverage of portage gaming by comparing the performance of several multimedia laptop PCs.

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Hardware Spotlight

MICROSOFT HAS A GRIP

SideWinder Gamepad

Rating: A+

One thing you have to say for Microsoft—when those people put their minds to something, they get it done. Microsoft went through a lot of time and trouble making sure its Windows 95 gamepad would be definitive. Time will tell if it can be trumped, but the **SideWinder** certainly is, for the moment, the standard-bearer.

Ergonomics was at the top of the drawing board when the designers cast the SideWinder in plastic. Most gamepads are flat and force you to cock your wrists. After hours of gaming, the wrists start to complain. But the SideWinder is shaped roughly like a catamaran (or the PlayStation controller), with two jutting pontoons that rest alongside the inside of the palms and allow for the pad to held in a more natural position. Like console controllers, you get six buttons, two triggers, and the D-pad.

Ten bucks says every major gamepad released for the next few years will more or less copy this design. It looks bizarre at first, but once it's been resting in your hands for a little while, no other gamepad brings you quite the same comfort.

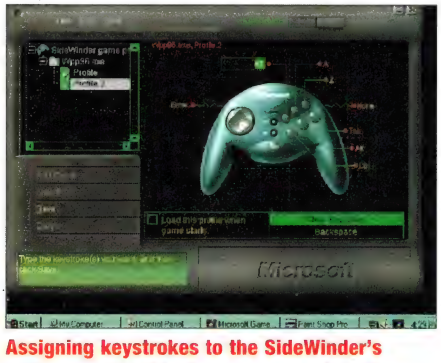
Just as important, you can daisy-chain four controllers, allowing four gamers to play simultaneously on the same machine from the same port. Each pad in the chain maintains full functionality, including the ability to assign keyboard strokes to the pad and set macros. It's God's gift to fighting gamers—not only do they both get a pad, but they can easily assign multibutton presses to the A, B, C, X, Y, and Z buttons. Game profiling software allows you to tailor your pad for each game you use it with. The system is simple (see the screenshot below) and is accomplished in about 10 seconds. Executing a macro is as easy as pressing the pad's M button, then pressing the button to which you've assigned the macro.

If you want to shun the pad for a joystick? That's fine, too—the joystick can daisy-chain with the pads, and it all works. Just hit the "mode" button to turn off the gamepad and use your joystick. No more fiddling around behind your system plugging and unplugging controllers. Also, you can use the pad's interface to program your SideWinder 3D Pro joystick as well.

And there's one more nice little feature: if the game directly supports the SideWinder, you can hit the pad's "start" button to begin or restart a game.

We were able to install, set up, program, daisy-chain, and play with the pads without any snag or instructions. Compatible with any Win 95 pad-supporting game (or DOS game running in Windows), the SideWinder gamepad is a must for any Win 95 gamer. (Microsoft; 800-426-9400; www.microsoft.com; $39)

—Daniel Morris



Assigning keystrokes to the SideWinder's buttons couldn't be faster or more intuitive.

THE CARD WITH IT ALL

Creative Labs' 3D Blaster

Rating: A

Just as we were shipping the magazine out the door, we got our hot little hands on Creative's 3D graphics accelerator. After spending a day or two with it, we knew we had to make room in these pages, because the Blaster rocks. It will make even skeptics believe that true arcade-style gameplay—with arcade-style graphics—is just around the corner.

Creative's **3D Blaster** uses Rendition's Vérité V1000 accelerator chip and comes with a hearty 4MB of video RAM. It's a "do-everything" card—it handles 2D acceleration and does all that 3D jazz, like texture mapping with perspective correction, bilinear filtering, z-buffering, alpha blending, mip-mapping, anti-aliasing, and more.

As you run for your 3D graphics dictionary, know that it means textures—even up

Microsoft's HellBender unaccelerated (top) and accelerated.

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close—are more detailed than you've ever seen before (unless you own an SGI workstation), lighting and shading effects are gorgeous, and "jaggies" are gone. It makes for fast, beautiful gaming.

Installation is a snap. We popped it in, and minutes later were marveling at the detail in HellBender. Quake ran smoothly and seamlessly at 768-by-576, and Duke ran like a dream in 800-by-600. We can't wait to see what companies such as Activision, id, Gremlin, and Interplay do with this technology. They are among the manufacturers that have announced plans to develop for the Vérité chip.

A word of caution: This is the first of a rash of upcoming Vérité-based accelerators. Intergraph just announced a $199 board based on the V1000, Sierra On-Line is releasing one soon, and so are several other companies. Most of these cards will be technically identical and will seek to differentiate themselves on price and software bundles. The 3DBlaster will be $199 and should be on store shelves when you read this. Bundled are an accelerated version of Quake, Battle Arena Toshinden, Flight Unlimited, and Rebel Moon. (Creative Labs; 800-998-1000; www.creativelabs.com; $199)

—Willem Knibbe

3D CONTROLLER

SpaceOrb 360 RealLife

Rating: B+

As 3D becomes the latest buzzword in the PC-gaming community, is it any surprise that 3D game controllers should make an appearance? Spacetec's SpaceOrb 360 RealLife, a gamepad-style controller, promises movement along six axes instead of the four you get with ordinary joysticks and gamepads.

The SpaceOrb's not entirely new; last year Spacetec test-marketed a product called the Spaceball Avenger as the company sought to adapt its 3D graphic design and CAD controller technology to the interactive game market. Feedback from this test brought various tweaks to SpaceOrb's design and feel.

SpaceOrb features a very comfortable plastic grip, molded neatly to the shape and size of any hand. The large ball controller moves very subtly through 360 degrees with minimal force. Six buttons—two on the shoulder of the pad and four on the main body—can be programmed to duplicate the effects of any keyboard command.

Installing the SpaceOrb is a relatively straightforward process: You simply plug it into a COM port, then configure it for Windows 95; you have to run a separate installation for DOS-games support. The SpaceOrb is automatically compatible with any Windows 95 action game, even if the

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Category	Product	Details	Our Rating
PC	Falcon Mach V	Falcon Northwest; 800-258-6778; approx. $4,000	A
Monitor	Nokia Valugraph 447L	Nokia; 800-296-6542; $699	B+
CD-ROM drive	Toshiba TXM3501E1	Toshiba; 714-457-0777; price not available	B+
Sound card	AWE32	Creative Labs; 800-998-5227; $249.95	A
Speakers	SoundWorks	Cambridge SoundWorks; 800-367-4434; $219	A+
Joystick	F-16 Combatstick	CH Products; 619-598-2518; $69.95	A+
Gamepad	SideWinder gamepad	Microsoft; 206-882-8080; $39	A+
Modem	Supra 28.8	Supra; 800-727-8772; $219 internal, $299 external	A
Graphics card	Lightspeed 128	STB Systems; 800-234-4334; street price $164	B+
Key add-on	NEC MultiSync M700 monitor	NEC; 800-632-4636; $899	A-

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game is controlled by a standard four-axis joystick. In DOS, each game needs to be individually configured—a generally painless process.

Two methods of movement, basic and full freedom, give you a beginning and advanced level of use. The interactive trainer included on the bundled CD (which also features shareware versions of Duke Nukem 3D and Descent II) takes you through the basic concepts involved in controlling the SpaceOrb.

While practice is definitely needed to master it, the SpaceOrb's movement style is so obvious that immersing yourself in the 3D environment of Descent is very easy. Certain pixel-perfect movements may prove too tricky to pull off, but with tweaking of the controller's sensitivity and a bit of practice, those fabled circle-strafing moves prove amazingly useful in deathmatches. (Spacetec IMC Corporation; www.spacetec.com; 508-970-0330; $99)

—Rob Smith

3D BOARDS WORK THEIR MAGIC

Righteous 3D

Grade: A

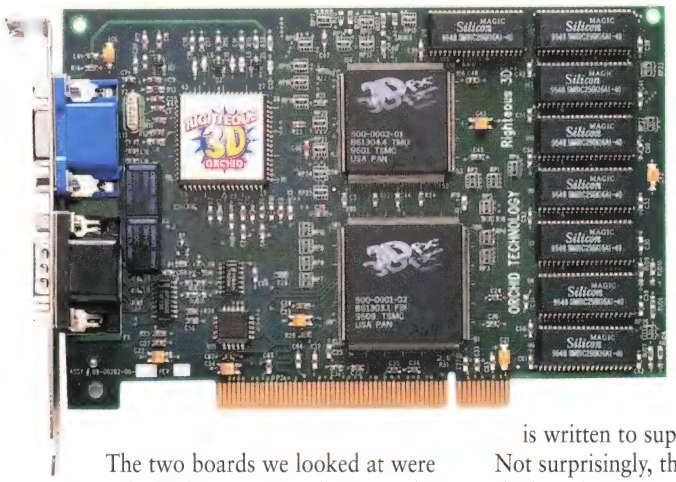
Monster 3D

Grade: A

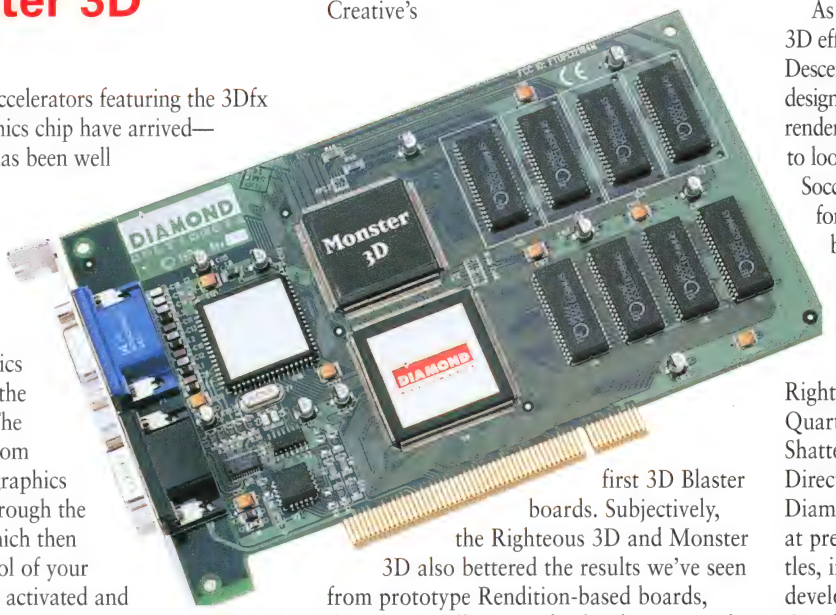
The first 3D accelerators featuring the 3Dfx Voodoo Graphics chip have arrived—and the wait has been well worth it.

Voodoo-based boards aren't meant to replace your existing graphics card; instead, the two coexist. The video signal from your current graphics card passes through the 3Dfx card, which then "grabs" control of your monitor when activated and relinquishes control back to your normal graphics card when you're done playing. The advantage of this process is that you may have a high-performance 2D card that you don't want to abandon just to get hardware-accelerated 3D. The downside is that these boards won't run 3D apps within Windows on the standard 3D desktop; they work only in "full-screen" mode.

Fine, fine, but how good is the 3D, you ask? Smoking. Awesome. Exhilarating. Satisfied?



The two boards we looked at were Orchid's **Righteous 3D** and Diamond's **Monster 3D**. We ran VR Soccer and Descent II head to head on each board, as well as a number of Direct3D games and 3Dfx-specific demos and games. Not surprisingly, the boards performed identically in our subjective tests—after all, they use the same chip to get the work done. Both boards handily outshined first-generation 3D products like Diamond Stealth 3D and Creative's



first 3D Blaster boards. Subjectively, the Righteous 3D and Monster 3D also bettered the results we've seen from prototype Rendition-based boards, though we will reserve final judgment until we fully review Creative's Rendition-based product.

While nearly identical, there were some differences between the Righteous 3D and Monster 3D. For example, the Righteous 3D board installs an extra "property sheet" in your display that gives you some additional control over the board's output, such as color saturation, and lets you run the supplied 3D demos. One annoying extra of the Righteous 3D is an audible clicking sound when the board switches between normal mode and 3D mode. The Monster 3D is essentially silent.

Both boards use 4MB of memory: 2MB for the display and 2MB for texture memory. They both require a Pentium system and Windows 95 for Direct3D support, but will work fine in DOS as long as a game is written to support the Voodoo chip.

Not surprisingly, the best demonstration of the boards' power isn't the bundled games, but a demo written by 3Dfx called "Wizard." Wizard lets you walk through *incredibly* detailed rooms that look like prerendered art—except it's all happening in real time. This demo is exciting because it represents the kind of quality we can expect from first-person games in the coming year, provided you have the kind of 3D hardware power these boards offer.

As for games, with Voodoo acceleration, the 3D effect in Descent was almost *too* good. Descent's lower-polygon-count models designed for unaccelerated machines were rendered so fast and flawlessly that they started to look, well, geometric. 3Dfx-enabled VR Soccer looks fantastic, besting the top platform equivalents. And EF2000 on these boards took on the appearance of a million-dollar flight simulator—the polys flow smoothly and freely.

Orchid bundles the following 3Dfx-enabled titles with the Righteous 3D: Descent II: Destination Quartzon, VR Soccer: Semifinals, Whiplash, Shattered Reality, Scorched Planet, and a Direct3D trial version of HellBender. Diamond was still finalizing its game bundle at press time. With a slew of upcoming titles, including Prey and Tomb Raiders, being developed to take advantage of Voodoo Graphics, you'll have plenty more to choose from by early next year.

For now, Righteous 3D and Monster 3D are the kings of 3D accelerators for games. (Orchid, 800-767-2443, $299; Diamond Multimedia, 800-468-5846, $299)

—David Gerding

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SIX-BUTTON HEAVEN

PC GamePad 6

RATING: A

InterAct Multimedia Products' new **PC GamePad 6** is a compact little input device that looks and feels like a console pad. Featuring six buttons and an Auto-On/Auto-Off feature that maintains one button's function while you press another, the GamePad 6 is remarkably versatile. With it, you'll be able to trade roundhouse kicks in Battle Arena Toshinden, navigate virtual battlezones in Assault Rigs, or orchestrate a pennant drive in Hardball 5. The pad seems to know all game genres.

It's also noticeably smaller than most gamepads. I like its compactness and the console feel it lends. Six fire buttons allow for a few more options in the course of play, which is always a big help—especially when the extra buttons throw combinations in fighting games or 360-degree spins during hockey.

The PC GamePad 6 installs very easily thanks to the included Win 95–compatible driver disk. It's as handy a PC gamepad as you'll find anywhere. (Interact Multimedia Products; 410-785-5661; www.gameshark.com; $29.95)

—Daniel Morris

GAME NETWORK

FunWIRE

Rating: D+

Considering its name, it's ironic that FunWIRE really isn't all that fun.

What's FunWIRE, you ask? It's a product from Moses Corporation that supposedly allows you to set up a game network at home—quickly, easily, and painlessly.

FunWIRE consists of either internal adapter cards that you pop into an existing PCI slot in your PC, or external adapters that connect to your computer's printer port. These cards are then strung together (in any combination) with ordinary phone cabling. Moses also gives you proprietary drivers to run Doom and the Hexen series (no Quake drivers yet).

And that's FunWIRE's main problem: It should really be called DoomWIRE, because those are pretty much the only games you can play over the FunWIRE network (ignore the claim on the box that it will run all NetBIOS-compatible titles). Want to play Duke or C&C? Sorry, you'll have to wait. Moses is working on IPX drivers that will allow FunWIRE to handle any IPX-compatible games without special drivers, which will make FunWIRE much more, well, fun.

It also was no great laughs installing FunWIRE. Hooking up two PCs with the external adapters was relatively easy, but the internal cards were another story, involving various resource conflicts that took much PC-savvy sleuthing to solve. Moses includes very minimal printed documentation and troubleshooting materials. Several separate help text files are included on the driver disk, but they're far from complete, and because they're split up, finding the info you're looking for is a needlessly frustrating experience.

As is, FunWIRE is a promising first effort, but more streamlining is needed to make it competitive with other similar products already on the market, such as Apexx Technologies' GameLAN (see review, July 1996, page 84).

You can buy FunWIRE in a few configurations: The FunWIRE Home Arcade kit includes two internal adapters, one 25-foot telephone cable, a user manual, and installation software for around $100. FunWIRE Party kits—which include two external adapters, two 12-foot cables, a manual, and installation software—run about $140 each, and will connect up to eight PCs, including laptops. (Moses Corporation; 408-358-1550; www.moses-tm.com).

—Steve Klett

STOP THOSE RESTARTS

Power2Play

Rating: B-

Software Labs' **Power2Play** is a program that allows you to run DOS programs in Windows 95 or Win 3.1 without having to restart the computer in DOS mode. After installing the disc, a Power2Play icon appears in your Program Manager window or Start Menu, which you can select to add a DOS program to your desktop. After scanning your hard drive and adding all your DOS games, Power2Play gives your desktop a stay-on-top menu bar with all your titles listed alphabetically.

Running the DOS game is then just as easy as opening the menu bar and mouse-clicking on your game. After doing that, you can switch games to your heart's content without having to quit out and restart each time.

The package contains the installation kit and the shareware versions of 71 DOS games from yesteryear. The most interesting include Rise of the Triad, Spear of Destiny, and a bunch of Lemmings titles.

Because it's a Windows product, some weird things can happen from time to time. Occasionally the program will start shuttling madly from window to window and then just as quickly stop. Also, advancing a level in a game can sometimes stick you with a blank window for a few seconds until the game kicks back in. These bugs may slow you down a bit, but there's nothing that will really goad you, and you'll be saving time in the long run by avoiding the routine system lockups that accompany Windows-to-DOS changes.

If system restarts drive you absolutely crazy, this may be a worthwhile investment. Having 71 shareware games on one disc is a nice bonus. (The Software Labs; 800-569-7900; www.softwarelabs.com; $34.95)

—Daniel Morris

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By Patrick Marshall

Making your modem speak up, skipping Win 95, and grabbing more conventional memory for older games.

S.O.S.

Modem Broadcast

I went to a friend's house and noticed that his modem's dialing and buzzing came from his satellite speakers rather than his PC speaker. Is there a way I could make my modem's sounds come out of my speakers, too?
David Troupe
Via the Internet

Well, I'll confess that I'm stumped as to why you'd want to pump those beeps, scratches, and whining sounds through your speakers. My first reaction is to look for a way to turn them off altogether. But yes, if you have a cooperative sound card and an internal modem, you can make your modem sounds come out through your speakers.

First, the easy way: Check to see if your modem has a "line out" or "speaker" jack. If it does, simply plug in a set of speakers to hear its sounds broadcast. If you want to use your existing speakers, you'll need to get a coupler cable and plug one end into the modem's jack and the other into your sound card's "line-in" jack. This way, the modem's sounds will be redirected through the sound card to your speakers.

If your modem doesn't have this kind of jack, it's a little more complicated. You'll have to disconnect the cable that runs between your PC speaker and your motherboard and run a cable from the same pin-out connector on the motherboard to your sound card. Most sound cards, including Creative Labs' SoundBlaster line, include just such a pin connector to substitute for the PC speaker.

There is, however, one snag you'll have to get around: Since motherboards don't arrange their speaker wires in a standardized fashion, you won't find standard cables in the computer store that connect the correct pins on the motherboard to the correct pins on the sound card. As a result, you'll probably have to make your own cable after consulting the manuals for your motherboard and the sound card to make sure you get the right connections.

Direct to DOS

I'm a dedicated gamer, and usually boot up through Win 95, then shut down into MS-DOS mode, which runs all my games perfectly. I have a question: Is there any way to get Win 95 to load up your AUTOEXEC.BAT and CONFIG.SYS files without loading Windows? I've found a way to use step-by-step confirmation of each line, and press "N" at the WIN command, but is there another way?
Jeff A. Tindle
Via the Internet

Absolutely! If you press the F8 key when the "Starting Windows 95" message appears during bootup, the system will offer a Startup menu. Among the eight choices are two that will do the job for you: Option 6 will load Windows drivers, as well as the AUTOEXEC.BAT and CONFIG.SYS files, and take you directly to the DOS prompt without waiting to load the Windows interface. If you want to load your previous version of DOS, select Option 8. This latter option will only work, of course, if you chose to retain your previous version of DOS when you installed Windows 95.

PhantasMPEGoria

Would an MPEG card make a game such as Phantasmagoria look even better than it already is, or does the game have to be MPEG-compatible?
Roberto Bellati
Via the Internet

The game does have to be MPEG-compatible, but you're in luck—Phantas is. MPEG stands for Motion Picture Experts Group. That group, under the aegis of the International Standards Organization, developed and approved the video compression standard that bears its acronym. Currently, most products that support MPEG employ MPEG-1, a standard approved in 1992. MPEG-1 provides full-screen video at TV quality, 30 frames per second.

What an MPEG card does is decompress the compressed video using specially designed processors. The same thing can be accomplished via software decompression, but not as quickly. With 486 processors, software MPEG decoding is unacceptably slow.

Two trends, however, are making it easier to get good video without a dedicated MPEG card. First, MPEG chipsets are increasingly being integrated into motherboards and graphics adapters. Second, with software improvements and faster Pentium systems, it's now possible to get decent MPEG performance without dedicated hardware.

Also keep your eyes peeled for new products that support MPEG-2, a newer, higher-resolution standard designed primarily for high-definition television and DVDs. Returning to your question, Phantasmagoria is in fact MPEG-compatible, and Sierra On-Line says that performance should improve significantly if you add MPEG hardware. But just how much improvement you see will depend upon the current configuration of your system.

Unconventional games

I have a Pentium 100 with 16MB of RAM, a 4X CD-ROM drive, and a 1.2GB

continued on page 184

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TECH SHOP, *continued from page 182*

hard drive. I should have the capability to run just about anything, yet three of my older games do not run. The error messages say I do not have enough conventional memory to run the game. The problem games are Betrayal at Krondor, Dragon Lore, and Return of the Phantom.
D. Surace
Carbondale, PA

Older DOS games tend to require large amounts of conventional memory. Unfortunately, one of the basic limitations of DOS is that it supports only 640KB of conventional memory regardless of how much additional memory you install.

Fortunately, some of the programs, devices, and drivers that are by default loaded into conventional memory can actually run in upper memory, freeing more of your critical conventional memory for programs that demand it, such as your older DOS games. If you have DOS 6.x, you can run its MEMMAKER utility (type MEMMAKER at the C prompt) to automatically configure your system to use upper memory. If you still don't have enough conventional memory available, try QuarterDeck's QEMM. This program takes an even more aggressive approach to freeing up conventional memory.

If you're strictly using Win 95 and don't have your previous version of DOS handy, you can create and edit configuration files for each DOS game you play. To do so, create a shortcut for the program and drag it to your desktop. Then right-click on the item and select Properties. From here, you'll be able to specify how the game uses memory by selecting the Memory tab.

Fax, mail, or e-mail your queries to the S.O.S. staff at:

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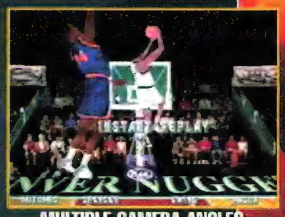

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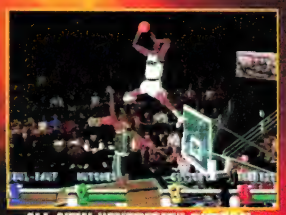

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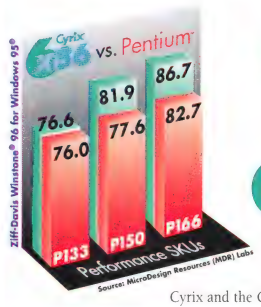

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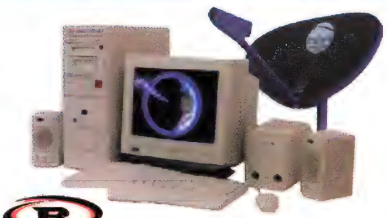

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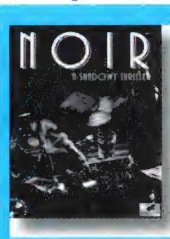

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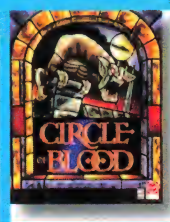

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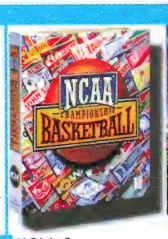

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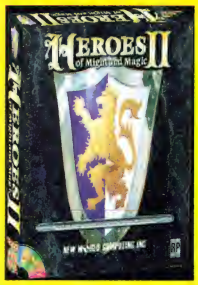

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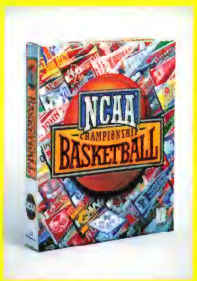

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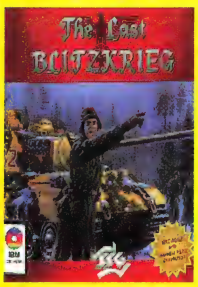

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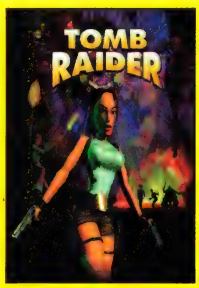

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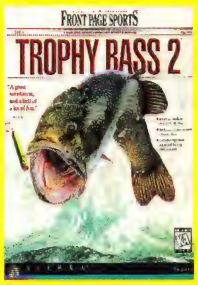

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_____

_____

2 What was the best thing about the experience?

_____

_____

3 What was the most frustrating thing about the experience?

_____

_____

4 How was the performance of the gameplay?

_____

_____

5 Do you plan to subscribe to any of the online-gaming services?

A. yes B. no

6 If yes, which one(s):

_____

_____

7 How much are you willing to pay for an online-gaming service?

_____

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8 What games are you most looking forward to playing on an online-gaming service?

_____

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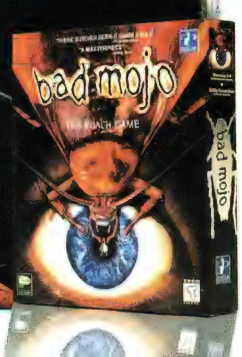

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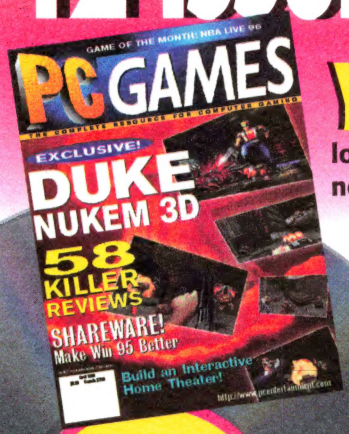

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